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The Role of Kingship in Statius' *Thebaid.*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses Statius' Thebaid and the relationship it creates with Virgil's Aeneid and the emperor Domitian. The poem constructs itself as a competing source of authority, both poetic and ideological. The poem aims to supersede Virgil's masterpiece as a poetic authority whilst providing Domitian with imperial, and in particular, regal ideology. The thesis examines three key qualities, *virtus*, *pietas* and *clementia* in this regard, showing the manner in which Virgilian and Augustan interpretations are undermined and new understandings of these ideas are provided for Domitian's principate. The thesis then examines the role tyranny and tyrannical behaviour plays in the poem. The *Thebaid* portrays *tyranny in unusual ways and promotes surprising responses to tyrannical rule. Throughout* the poem, Statius is working to provide his audience, especially Domitian, with an educational framework for understanding models of kingship; Domitian should learn from the negative examples the *Thebaid* provides. Statius uses the *Thebaid* as a step in a poetic oeuvre whose design is nothing less than to make the poet himself powerful by becoming the poetic voice on which his emperor depends.

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Ideas have become reality in the five years since I arrived at UCL (although the Statian average of one chapter per year was not deliberate). Richard Rawles and David Leith (chief amongst many others) provided support, distraction and alcohol when it was most needed. *Jonathan Prag gave timely advice and gave me opportunities to expand my* transferable skills set. Teaching opportunities at London Universities broadened my horizons whilst earning me pocket money and I should thank Richard Alston, Effie Spentzou, Richard Hawley, Ingo Gildenhard and Stephen Instone (and countless others) for putting up with me, and all my students from the last five years for inspiring me.

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All errors, infelicities and howlers remain my own. Like Statius, I'll try and make out that it was meant to be that way.

ABBREVIATIONS

The abbreviations are those of *L'Année Philologique* and *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edn, 2000), with the following additions:

AE *L'Année épigraphique*
ANRW H. Temporini (ed.) (1972-) *Aufstieg und Niederganag in der Römischen Welt*. Berlin & New York.
CAH^2 (2000) *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edn. Cambridge.
ILS H. Dessau (ed.) (1882-1916) *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin.
OLD P.G.W. Glare (ed.) (1969-82) *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford.
RE (1893-) *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswisschenshaft*. Stuttgart.
TLL (1900-) *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Leipzig.

TEXTS

All ancient texts are quoted from the *Oxford Classical Texts* series with the following exceptions:

Cassius Dio: E. Cary (ed.) (1914) *Dio's Roman History*. 9 vols. Loeb, Cambridge, MA.
Cyclic *Thebaid*: M.L. West (ed.) (2003) *Greek Epic Fragments*. Loeb, Cambridge, MA.
Lucan *Bellum Civile*: D.R. Shackleton Bailey (ed.) (1988) *Lucanus – de Bello Civili*. Teubner, Stuttgart.
Ovid *Fasti*: E.H. Alton, D.E.W. Wormell & E. Courtney (eds.) (1988) *Ovidius – Fasti*. Teubner, Stuttgart.
Ovid *Heroides* 5 and 7: P.E. Knox (ed.) (1995) *Ovid – Heroides, select epistles*. Cambridge.
Scriptores Historiae Augustae: H. Peter (ed.) (1884) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*. Teubner, Stuttgart.
Seneca *de Clementia*: J.W. Basore (ed.) (1928) *Seneca – Moral Essays*. 3 vols. Loeb, London & New York.
Seneca *Naturales Quaestiones*: P. Oltramare (ed.) (1929) *Sénèque – Questions Naturelles*. 3 vols. Budé, Paris.
Silius Italicus *Punica*: P. Miniconi & G. deVallet (1979) *Silius Italicus – La Guerre Punique*. 4 vols. Budé, Paris.
Statius *Thebaid*: D.E. Hill (ed.) (1983) *Statius – Thebaidos Libri XII*. Brill, Leiden.
Suetonius *Lives of the Caesars*: M. Ihm (ed.) (1973) *Suetonius – de Vita Caesarum Libri*. Teubner, Stuttgart.
Valerius Maximus: D.R. Shackleton Bailey (ed.) (2000) *Valerius Maximus – Memorable Doings and Sayings*. 2 vols. Loeb, Cambridge, MA.

INTRODUCTION

Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet,
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder;
Nothing but thunder! Merciful Heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle: but man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

(Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* II, ii)

Statius' *Thebaid* is a poem about kingship. Autocratic rule is a constant theme of the poem; most of its protagonists are rulers, or those who would be kings; others must decide how to behave within societies dominated by autocracy. Furthermore, self-rule and governance of one's own nature is a constant issue for the individual; societies are divided as monarchs vie for power. In his introductory chapter of a massive collection of essays on Flavian Rome, Boyle presents Statius' *Thebaid* as an overwhelming assault on imperial power in Rome. The poem, he claims:

> 'rewrites Greek myth and Virgilian epic to participate directly in the discourse of civil war and imperial power, and to fashion itself as an indictment of both, and of the military ethos and values that generate them...Roman values topple in the process, especially Augustan and Flavian imperial values.'[1]

[1] Boyle (2003) 50-1.

Boyle's analysis is perceptive, but this thesis aims to demonstrate that it is overzealous in its eagerness to read the poem as an outright condemnation of all Flavian values. We should see Boyle as reading the *Thebaid* along Virgilian lines, or rather, along lines of modern Virgilian scholarship, where epic is read as praise or condemnation of the political regime that produces it. This thesis aims to move away from this process of debate and to do so by using Boyle's terms of analysis in a more sophisticated manner. It is our contention that the *Thebaid* does indeed rewrite Virgilian epic and Virgilian values but that this has different implications for Domitian's regime. Moreover, Lucan's *Bellum Civile* becomes an equally important model for Statius as the *Thebaid* cross-contaminates mythological poetry with civil war epic to produce a poem that radically destabilises the Virgilian archetype. This destabilisation is presented in marked contrast to the positive appraisal of Flavian Rome. The *Thebaid* is involved in a process of construction of Domitianic values that spans all of Statius' poetic oeuvre as well as many other cultural products of Domitian's reign. The undermining of Virgilian epic and its values is an important starting point for Statius' political-poetic enterprise. His rewriting is implicated in a desire by Domitian to 'rewrite' imperial Rome with Domitian at its head as an emperor superior to Augustus, a divine leader in a new Roman age. Statius is not the only player in a hugely widespread process that was ultimately doomed to failure by Domitian's assassination and subsequent *damnatio memoriae*. Writers such as Martial, Valerius Flaccus and Silius Italicus had their part to play and other media as diverse as coinage, sculpture, statuary and architecture had fundamental roles in creating Domitianic ideology. While this thesis will concentrate its attention upon the *Thebaid* these artistic works and Statius' later poetry will become important touchstones in our discussions.

The *Thebaid* has a restricted part to play in this process. Its references to the emperor anticipate the immoderate praise that Statius will accord his emperor in his *Silvae*, but the ultimate intention of the poem is not to provide Domitian with his new ideology but to clear the ground of old ideologies. Furthermore, Statius creates a poem that presents itself as an educational text. Thus his audience, especially the emperor, will learn by reading a

poem which is constructed as a negative example. The display of Virgilian virtues in the corrupted world of the *Thebaid* acts as an example of how not to behave. The old and established values, methods and language exemplified above all in the *Aeneid* are revealed as hopelessly inadequate in modern Rome. Domitian's empire needs to re-evaluate the ideas that epic represents and present a new form of epic heroism.

Yet Domitian's brave new world is not an abrupt break from the past. Rather, Domitian and the artists who created the ideological framework of his regime sought to develop the legacy of previous regimes. Domitian developed the ideologies of his father and brother, sometimes with a view towards continuity, sometimes with the intention of significant change. The Flavian dynasty *in toto* sought links with the Julio-Claudians who preceded them, especially Claudius, with a view to legitimising their regime whilst distancing themselves from Nero, the civil war of 69 and their acquisition of power by force. The *Thebaid* undeniably plays a significant role in this process with a profoundly pessimistic portrayal of the kind of civil war from which father Vespasian and his heroic sons rescued Rome.[2] Although Virgilian values are rejected, the terms in which these values are expressed are not removed in favour of new ones. Rather, Domitian's interlocutor Statius will seek to invigorate notions such as *virtus*, *pietas* and *clementia* with new meaning. Following an extended investigation into the *Thebaid*'s re-evaluation of the *Aeneid* and its construction of an ideological and educational dialogue with Domitian, the scale of our discussion will limit us to an evaluation of these three values that are at the core of Virgil's *Aeneid* and all subsequent Roman epic.

Such re-evaluations of traditional values can be seen in other aspects of Flavian culture. Recent studies have, for example, explored how Valerius' *Argonautica* reflects the increasing urge for Roman elite males to compete as contestants in the arena in an attempt to reclaim *virtus*. Argonautic exploits are depicted as amphitheatrical contexts. Meanwhile, the explosion of hunting imagery in Domitianic statuary signals the emperor's desire for Roman

[2] Cf. the emphasis on Domitian's exploits on the Capitoline, *Theb.* 1.21-2; Sil. *Pun.* 3.609-11.

males to display *virtus* in contexts other than warfare or politics.[3] Furthermore, the end of the *Thebaid* has been read as a transformation of *pietas* into a female value, one which undercuts the ethos of male heroism at the core of Roman epic.[4] Developments of and reactions to Neronian ideals of *clementia* are also a constant feature of the Flavian period.[5] The *Thebaid* complements these redirections of Roman values by depicting the expression of *virtus* in warfare as self-destructive, *pietas* as deeply divided and fractured, *clementia* as weak and ineffective. Furthermore, the traditional contexts for these qualities have been arrogated by imperial authority; the Roman elite male must find new areas in which to display his virtues.

Finally, we examine Statius' depiction of the tyrant in the *Thebaid* and read Statius' tyrants as an educational example which Domitian should *not* imitate. The themes of self-destruction, division and weakness are still apparent in the poem's portrayal of tyranny; tyrants are oddly ineffective rulers who damage themselves as much as others. Surprisingly, Statius' poetry suggests a response to tyrannical behaviour other than brazen opposition; his poetic programme is both advocate and example of working successfully within the confines of tyrannical rule. Ultimately, kingship is not something worth struggling against, whatever the negative impact of autocratic rule upon society. Statius depicts a system where it is possible to survive and flourish even under the worst tyrant. The conflict between twins acts against the essential principle of kingship, that power should be invested in one man alone. Furthermore, the educational element in Statius' poetry ensures that by working within such a system, one can improve it. Statius' *Thebaid*, indeed his whole oeuvre, not only re-writes the principles of Augustan epic, but inscribes the values of Domitianic epic. It is the primary function of the poem not simply to respond to other sources of meaning and power but also to create, design and establish new meanings of its own.

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[3] Zissos (2003); Tuck (2005).
[4] Dietrich (1999).
[5] Dowling (2006) esp. 213-22.

PROBLEMS WITH AUTHORITY:

THEBAID'S RELATIONSHIP WITH *AENEID* AND DOMITIAN

1. Preludes.

Statius has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent classical scholarship. Until the recent explosion in scholarly work on all 'Silver' Latin literature, Statius' poetry, when it was regarded at all, was regarded with something close to contempt. His great epic poem the *Thebaid* was seen as derivative, unoriginal, episodic, mannerist. Farrell has noted the use of such pejorative, metallic terminology in a discussion that sees Statius as part of a wider problem and, indeed, a wider re-evaluation.[6] He also notes how scholars of imperial Latin poetry:

> 'have attempted to remove the judgmental connotations of the received imagery by substituting words like "early imperial" for "silver". This isn't really much of a change. Rather like BCE and CE for BC and AD, it actually endorses the traditional structure of history while proposing new, more "politically correct" labels for the very same historical periods.'[7]

Mayer has charted the denigration of Silver Latin poetry and notes that the term 'Silver Latin' has been current since the sixteenth century.[8] Gradually, modern scholarship has moved away from the criticisms of Statius that are traditionally entailed in words such as

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[6] Farrell (2001) 90-2.

[7] Farrell (2001) 91. Similar to "early imperial" is my preferred label "post-Augustan". Fitting Ovid into this historical scheme has proved difficult since the 16th century: see Mayer (1999) 144. For analysis of Ovid as a 'transitional' poet, see also Galinsky (1989). Note the irony that those who criticise Silver Latin and reinforce the Silver/Gold opposition the most are those who choose to highlight the derivative nature of Silver Latin poetry. I stick to BC/AD throughout as potential for confusion through typing errors is considerable in the BC/BCE system.

[8] Mayer (1999), esp. 147.

'Silver', and the need to apologise for working on so 'weak' an author. Statius has become so fashionable that a recent monograph on the *Thebaid* enthuses about the poem:

> 'It is no empty rhetorical stance, then, when I refuse to apologise for working on Statius. Statius can and should be central to our understanding of ancient epic, and critical work on the *Thebaid* can start from the position that the aim is elaboration and enrichment of understanding, not justification of the poem itself.'[9]

Such a stance is undoubtedly liberating, but the sense that Statius' poetry is worth reading is only the beginning. We still tend to read Statius' *Thebaid* in two ways. We explore the relationship that the poem has with the emperor Domitian.[10] We also explore the relationship the poem has with earlier literature, especially epic poetry, especially heroic, martial epic poetry, especially Virgil's *Aeneid*.[11] Both relationships are problematic for a modern reader. Modern scholars still regard Statius as 'secondary'; his poetry still belongs to the 'Silver' age of poetry. Both these terms will, unless used with caution, undoubtedly imply inferiority. The language which describes Statius' poetry is itself coloured by a previous generation's point of view: Virgil is better. Indeed, our view of Roman literary history centres on the fact that we view the Augustan age as the Golden age of Roman literature, and above all the great *Aeneid* as the apogee. Thus all our readings of literature written after 14 AD are still created with (at least) one eye firmly fixed upon the Augustan past.

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[9] Lovatt (2005) 3n.6. See here for details of the shift in modern attitudes towards the poem; cf. Ahl (1986) 2809-10. For the *Thebaid*'s entry into the canon, see Juv. 7.82-6; Curtius (1953) 48-54; Dewar (1991) xxxvii-xxxix, but cf. the suggestion by Henderson (1991) 39 that the medieval interest in Statius' poem was superficial: 'they honour the name, mime the composition, or love the homage to Virgil. But ditch the sociopolitics.' The rehabilitation of Statius has followed the pattern of the rehabilitation of Ovid. We are, I suspect, witnessing an explosion of work on Statius much as Myers (1999) witnessed in Ovidian studies in the 1990s.

[10] Cf. esp. Ahl (1984); (1986); Dominik (1994).

[11] Cf. esp. Hardie (1993).

We mimic literary criticism of the early empire in this regard, despite Mayer's compelling arguments that ancient critics regarded literary success as an individual achievement not as a historical process.[12] Quintilian regarded the literature of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries AD with great optimism and praised it greatly (*IO* 10.1.102-4, 119-22). Yet, in his eyes, the great tragedian of the age, Pomponius Secundus, was not ranked among the absolute best (10.1.98). Pliny, whilst admiring Martial's achievements, feared for the future of his poetry (*Ep.* 3.21). Messalla in Tacitus' *Dialogus* 25-32 makes a powerful case for widespread decline, especially in forensic oratory, while Maternus dwells on the past (11-13).[13] For the Romans themselves then, there was much of value in 'Silver' Latin, but they still harked back to the literary and oratorical heyday of the late Republic and Augustan empire: 'of course there was no-one to rival Cicero or Virgil, no lyrist as good as Horace.'[14]

Yet Statius himself shared this 'anxiety of influence'. It is a given that Statius' epic, by virtue of being a belated, post-Augustan poem, is deeply and indeed almost cripplingly indebted to Virgil's *Aeneid*. The *Aeneid* acquired the status of a classic almost instantly; Propertius was singing Virgil's praises even before the poem's completion (2.34b.59-66), so a century later Statius himself could refer without a hint of irony to the 'divine *Aeneid*' (*Theb.* 12.816). Statius encouraged much of the adverse criticism he received in the 20th century by staging his own secondariness within the text of his own epic.[15] As Gibson says: 'if we are looking for models of Statian deference in the tradition, they are not hard to find.'[16] At the end of the *Thebaid*, Statius orders his poem not to try to follow too closely in the *Aeneid*'s footsteps (12.816-17).[17] Furthermore, the episode of Hopleus and Dymas, two characters who are apparently rather superior versions of Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus,[18] ends with Statius' view that his two characters are only just worthy of acceptance by their

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[12] See Mayer (1999) 146.
[13] Although these views are not shared by Aper, Tac. *Dial.* 5.3-10.8; 16.4-23. See Mayer (2001) *ad loc.*
[14] Mayer (1999) 146.
[15] See Hinds (1998) *passim* on Statius and secondariness.
[16] Gibson (2004) 149.
[17] Duff (1964) 374 sees the sphragis as concerning: 'above all his worshipful reverence for Virgil, the inspirer of his epic style.'
[18] See Pollmann (2001) 17-26.

Virgilian counterparts (10.445-8).[19] Classical scholarship now regards secondariness as productive rather than self-defeating.[20] Yet the Virgilian obsession of Statius' epic restricts our understanding and acknowledgement of the way in which other, non-Virgilian literature influenced it, despite the work that has been done on this subject.[21] Moreover, such obsessions also restrict our perception of these other literary relationships colouring Statius' reading of Virgil.

Statius represents the *Thebaid* with an increasing air of confidence for the success of his poem as a rival to Homer and Virgil as time passes. The prose preface to his first book of *Silvae* reveals anxiety for his poem: *quid enim *** quoque auctoritate editionis onerari, quo adhuc pro Thebaide mea, quamvis me reliquerit, timeo?* (*Silvae* 1 *praef.* 5-7). Yet a few years later,[22] when Statius begins to compose his next epic poem, the *Achilleid* (itself a rival to Homer's *Iliad* of course), he seems full of confidence about his earlier epic:

> quippe te fido monitore nostra
> *Thebais multa cruciata lima*
> temptat audaci fide Mantuanae
> gaudia famae.
>
> (*Silvae* 4.7.25-8)[23]

Statius' *Thebaid* now exudes confidence in its rivalry with the *Aeneid*. Statius provocatively presents this rivalry in terms which explicitly recall his apparent deference at the end of the *Thebaid* (12.810-19). He again presents his epic, which required so much

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[19] See Kytzler (1969) 210-11; Hinds (1998) 92.
[20] Hardie (1993) and Hinds (1998) are key landmarks on this road.
[21] The most wide-ranging work on literary influences on Statius is Delarue (2000). A comprehensive list of scholarly works is impossible, but for Homeric influence, see Juhnke (1972); for Callimachean influence, see Brown (1994); for influence of Senecan tragedy, see Frings (1992). Ovid's influence has been explored in a more piecemeal way, and scholarship is summarised in Keith (2002). Lucan's importance to Statius is still underrated, but see Malamud (1995); Lovatt (1999); Micozzi (1999); (2004). For Flavian epic, see McGuire (1997); Ripoll (1998). For an intriguing analysis of Statius' intertextual method, see Smolenaars (2004).
[22] On the chronology of Statius' literary career, see Coleman (1988) xv-xxii.
[23] See Coleman (1988) *ad loc*; Heslin (2005) 60-1.

work (cf. *Theb.* 12.810-12), as a female personification who now dares to make trial of (cf. *tempta*, *Theb.* 12.816) Mantuan fame (cf. *Fama*, *Theb.* 12.812). Statius' use of *cruciata* (4.7.26) is an especially powerful metaphor that emphasises the element of personification and the pain, even torture, that his poem has undergone to achieve its success.[24] Yet despite the imagery of torture, Statius' stance towards his poem has shifted from concern to confidence, and the poet emphasises this shift by reusing the language of deference from the end of the *Thebaid*. The poetic plural, *nostra* (contrast *mea* at *Silvae* 1 *praef.* 6), indicates Statius' burgeoning confidence; the *Thebaid* is now part of a wider literary community, something in which all of Statius' readers have a stake.

The preface to book 1 of the *Silvae* also reveals another element in Statius' anxiety for his poem. Publication of this collection of 'spontaneous' poems will produce a burden of authority (*auctoritate editionis*). Sadly the text at this point is corrupt, and it is unclear whether the burden falls upon the texts themselves or upon their author. Nauta tentatively suggests that the lacuna between *enim* and *quoque* be filled by <*oportet me huius*> and that *quo* be changed to *qui* (resulting in the translation: 'for why should I burden myself with the responsibility for this publication as well, anxious as I still am for my *Thebaid*, although it has left my hands?').[25] Alternatively, Courtney suggests that the lacuna be filled by <*opus eo tempore hos*> thus avoiding the need to change *quo*, and he is followed in this by Shackleton Bailey (the latter's translation: 'For why <should they too> be burdened with the authority of publication <at a time> when I am still anxious for my *Thebaid*, although it has left my hands?').[26] If we elide the difference between text and poet, it appears that Statius sees publication, the revelation of his poetic production before a wider public gaze, as an act which sets up himself and/or his poetry as authoritative in some sense. Statius recognises that the production of a text creates power (whether for the text itself or the author or both is a moot point). Statius makes himself a powerful figure by writing. What follows in Statius' preface is equally intriguing: *sed et Culicem legimus et Batrachomachiam etiam*

[24] *OLD* s.v. *crucio*.
[25] Nauta (2002) 281n.88.
[26] Courtney (1990) *ad loc*; Shackleton Bailey (2003) *ad loc*. My personal inclination is to this reading.

agnoscimus, nec quisquam est inlustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit (Silvae 1 praef. 7-9). Statius compares the *Culex* (which, like Lucan and Martial, he accepted as Virgil's)[27] to his *Silvae*, a prelude before writing serious poetry.[28] Statius again uses a part of *praeludo* to describe the act of producing his poetry at the beginning of the *Achilleid*, another epic that acts as a prelude to a promised panegyric of Domitian: *te longo necdum fidente paratu | molimur magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles* (*Ach.* 1.18-19). The implication is obvious: Statius' first martial epic, the *Thebaid*, is also a prelude to a greater work (*Theb.* 1.17-33 confirms this). Moreover, it is a light work, something unserious, a poetic trifle: 'mythological epic is equally a game in comparison to the true labour of historical panegyric.'[29] Yet this sits uneasily with the previous sentence in Statius' preface, which asserts that his published texts have *auctoritas*.[30] This must imply that his epic poems have even more *auctoritas* as poetry more serious and weightier than the *Silvae*.[31] Is the poet joking when he calls his epics and occasional poetry trivial? Do the poems really have *auctoritas*? Can we separate the rivalry and thus the stature that Statius' epics have in comparison to the *Aeneid* and *Iliad* from the lightness that they possess in comparison to a putative panegyric of Domitian?

The answers to these questions seem to rest with Domitian. Modern scholarship on the political impact of Statius' poetry has been even more polarised than positive/negative oppositions that have informed discussion of Virgil and Augustus in recent decades. Standpoints generally build upon preconceived ideas on Domitian's tyrannical character[32] and discuss whether Statius was sincere in his praise of his emperor or whether he encoded

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[27] Suet. *Vit. Luc.*; Mart. 8.55.20; 14.185.
[28] On *praeludo* and poetry as game playing, see Lovatt (2005) 8-10.
[29] Lovatt (2005) 10. Statius' apparent denigration of his epic also anticipates Tacitus' questioning of the validity of his *Annales*, *Ann.* 4.32-3.
[30] *OLD* s.v. *auctoritas*, 5 'guidance, lead, advice', 8 'authority of utterance', 8b of works of art 'impressiveness, dignity, authority', 10 'a precedent, example'.
[31] For Statius' attitude towards epic and lyric, cf. *Silvae* 4.7.11-12, *nunc maior sitit et bibendus | castior amnis.*
[32] See esp. Griffin (2000a) 55-6.

his poetry with subtle criticism.[33] It is not my intention to enter this critical minefield here, but we should make certain points clear before we move further. Firstly the ancient sources themselves are polarised in their views of Domitian. Statius and Martial, the latter until Domitian's assassination at any rate, speak of their emperor in ways that can only be described as gut-wrenchingly obsequious. Later authors, Martial after Domitian's death,[34] Suetonius, Pliny, Tacitus and Juvenal only refer to Domitian in terms of extreme condemnation.[35] Martial himself provides perhaps the best examples of this dramatic shift in opinion as the one major author to write both under Domitian and after.[36] Under Domitian, he praises the emperor's new palace as superior to the pyramids (8.36.1, *regia pyramidum, Caesar, miracula ride*), but, after Domitian's assassination, spurns it as the extravagance of an arrogant monarch (12.15.4-5, *et stupet superbi | regis delicias*). We cannot find anything in the ancient sources even approximating a balanced view. Moreover, we should resist the temptation to take any of these sources as canonical in their representations of Domitian. It is all too easy to slip into a mode of discussion where post-Domitianic authors, especially those writing under Trajan, become monolithic, objective representations of the Roman world between 81 and 96 AD.[37] Instead, these later sources are as mutable and subjective as the contemporary ones.[38] Secondly, we should note that the obsequious language of praise used by Statius and Martial of Domitian is extremely similar to the equally obsequious

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[33] The subtle criticism argument is made especially strongly by Ahl (1984) 78-124; (1986); Dominik (1994); McGuire (1997). More positive analyses of Statius' view of Domitian include Hill (1989); (1996); Braund (1996a).

[34] See Fearnley (2003) on Martial book 10.

[35] Tacitus' *Agricola* is the text that does more damage to Domitian's subsequent reputation than any other, partly because it was published so soon after Domitian's death (Ogilvie & Richmond (1967) 7-11 date publication to the spring of 98 AD) and partly because it is as much devoted to condemnation of Domitian as it is a biography of Agricola (Ogilvie & Richmond (1967) 16-21). The publication date endorses the tyrannical portrait of Domitian offered by the work (Ogilvie & Richmond (1967) 11): 'The date is of importance for the understanding of the work. Tacitus had just held the highest office in the land: he must also have played an active part in the stirring events of the recent months – the death of Domitian, the accession of Nerva, and the adoption of Trajan.'

[36] See e.g. Kay (1985); Fearnley (2003).

[37] E.g. Markus (2003) 431 refers to Pliny and Tacitus as 'control texts' as though they were neutral. In fairness, her discussion is very scrupulous about what elements from these authors she uses, but the terminology is worrying.

[38] Cf. Tacitus' denigration of Flavian historical accounts of 69 AD as distorted by a concern for flattery, *Histories* 2.101.

language used of Trajan by the likes of Pliny.[39] In other words, such high praise is conventional, even formulaic. Pliny knew this, and played at differentiating his genuine praise of Trajan from the fake and extorted praise of Domitianic days (*Pan.* 2.1-2).[40] We cannot infer from such praise the attitude of the venerator towards the object of praise. Statius may find the praise he writes of Domitian repellent, as many modern readers do, or he may whole-heartedly believe that Domitian deserves the praise he receives. Moreover, we should note that such a convention of praise means that the emperor himself should not compel performance. Instead the convention allows, even obliges the giver of praise to maintain a fictional stance of spontaneity.[41] Again, it is for this reason that Pliny claims that Domitian insisted upon *adulatio* whenever he was addressed in public (*Pan.* 1.6).[42] Furthermore, whilst such praise is exceptionally hyperbolic in character, hyperbole is a feature that characterises all Flavian literature and indeed much later literature.[43] We cannot take at face value the extreme nature of Statius' references to Domitian. Finally, we should acknowledge the polarised responses in the majority of scholarly analysis of the politics of Statius' poetry. Many scholars see the poet either as arch-critic or toadying sycophant and rarely anything in between. Recovering an informed notion of Statius' attitude to his emperor is difficult, and instead I contend that we should examine the attitude to the emperor conveyed in the poetry itself. Such a statement may seem to be a reworking of the hackneyed 'we must take the poem on its own terms' but confining our examination to the *Thebaid*'s attitude towards Domitian and not reconstructing Statius' point of view affords us a number of critical luxuries. We can sidestep much more easily some of the problems of historical context, the subjectivity of all the sources and the dichotomy that many readers have seen between the 'pessimistic' *Thebaid* and the 'super-positive' *Silvae*.

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[39] See Griffin (2000a) 55-6.

[40] On this see Bartsch (1994) 148-87, esp. 149-53 on *Pan.* 2.1-2. Cf. Tacitus' own characterisation of Nerva's and Trajan's principates as *principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani...rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet*, *Hist.* 1.1.4, despite the fact that he would never write a history of Nerva and Trajan.

[41] More generally on such matters see White (1993); on later panegyric, Rees (2002).

[42] See Coleman (1986) 3111-2.

[43] Cf. Micozzi (2004). Her notion of 'memoria diffusa' aims at describing the Flavian poets' taste for hyperbole, after the manner of Lucan.

We can now return to the original question regarding the historical poem that Statius promises Domitian. All three of Statius' works begin with a *recusatio*, a statement that acknowledges a (possibly fictional?) request by Domitian for a historical panegyric charting his achievements, especially his military achievements, then puts off such a project in favour of an easier, lighter work (*Theb.* 1.17-33; *Silvae* 1 *praef.* 5-9; *Achilleid* 1.14-20).[44] The strange presentation of such poetry as light, playful work is a strategy that protects the poet from his emperor. Just as the *Thebaid* constitutes a challenge to the authority of Virgil and Homer, it also constitutes a challenge to the authority of Domitian.[45] Statius' use of the term *auctoritas* encapsulates this. All Statian poetry is a challenge to the emperor because it is not what he wants and not what he expects to hear. It is certainly suggestive that both Statius' successful entry at the Alban games, a poem about Domitian's campaigns in Germany and Dacia (*Silvae* 4.2.66-7), and P. Annius Florus' unsuccessful entry at another games (mentioned in *Vergilius orator an poeta* 1.4),[46] a poem on the Dacian triumph, take Domitian's military exploits as their subject. Moreover, it is also intriguing that both consider Domitian the sole judge (of any importance anyway) at the Capitoline games (*Silvae* 3.5.31-3; 5.3.231-3; Florus *Verg.* 1.4) despite the fact that the existence of a body of jurors is attested (*ILS* 5178).[47] Whatever the reality, Statius undoubtedly operated in world where accounts of Domitian's military exploits were the expected content of poetry addressed to him, and where the emperor himself would receive and judge this poetry. The *Thebaid* portrays itself as a spontaneously constructed and performed piece.[48] Statius plays with the connection between texts and power. Bowman and Woolf have noted that: 'Power over texts encompasses restrictions placed on writing, on access to and possession of texts, on the legitimate uses to which the written word might be put and, perhaps most importantly,

[44] See Rosati (2003); Nauta (2006).
[45] Rosati (2003) explores the way in which the figure of the Muse helps to transfer blame for writing 'the wrong epic' away from Statius.
[46] Coleman (1986) 3099 attributes Florus' defeat to the Alban games, Nauta (2002) 306-7 attributes his defeat to the Capitoline games in 90 or 94 AD. More generally see Hardie (2003) esp. 145 on this point.
[47] See Nauta (2002) 330-5.
[48] See Markus (2003).

restrictions on reading texts.'[49] It is one of the contentions of this chapter that Statius recognises these effects of power over texts. Moreover, Statius knew that such power was normally placed in the hands of the emperor or his agents.[50] Statius uses his poem to wrest power away from Domitian and this process is twofold. Statius breaks away from more normal restrictions placed upon writing and the uses to which writing is put by producing an epic that confounds Domitian's expectations. Further he challenges the limitations normally placed on access to texts and restrictions on reading by producing a text that will not only be read by the emperor or heard once only in competition, but read and re-read by the Roman public at large. In summing up these initial thoughts, our contention here is that a desire to break the Virgilian mould and a desire to present something difficult, challenging, even dangerous before the emperor inform Statius' choices as an epic poet.

2. The problem of autocracy.

Given that Statius' poem is something directed explicitly and intentionally at the emperor, this presents us as readers of the *Thebaid* with an interpretive problem. In its essence, the *Thebaid* presents a narrative that is extremely dark, depressing and pessimistic. The major characters are generally tyrants and these include Eteocles, Creon once he becomes king of Thebes, and Jupiter. Polynices is generally seen as a tyrant in waiting, only less extreme than his twin brother because of his exile, yet nonetheless consumed with a desire for ruling Thebes.[51] Adrastus is an older and less extreme ruler, but he is a failure of a different kind as a monarch. He is old and incapable of restraining his younger companions, and runs away when his army is defeated. Only Theseus can provide anything approaching a positive incarnation of a monarch in the narrative world of the poem, and this view of him is

[49] Bowman & Woolf (1994) 6. My analysis conflates reading with hearing at public recitation, although I acknowledge that the two processes do have important differences.
[50] E.g. Sextus in Martial 5.5, see Nauta (2002) 342-8.
[51] See Chapter 5 below.

itself controversial.[52] Autocracy in all its forms seems consistently bad throughout the *Thebaid*, and yet at *1.17-33*, throughout the *Silvae*, and at the beginning of the *Achilleid* (1.14-19), Statius lauds Domitian. If Theseus is as bad as his fellow kings in Greece then Statius' work presents two contrasting pictures of autocracy where Domitian's good leadership stands out against with the mythical tyrants of the *Thebaid*.[53] Those who hold the most profoundly negative views of the poem feel the pull of Lucan, Seneca, and Neronian Stoicism and cite suicide as the only possible 'solution' to this pressing concern. Autocracy therefore is deeply problematic. We as readers must reconcile the negative portrayal of tyrannical autocracy in the *Thebaid* with the positive approach to the realities of autocracy in Rome.

Furthermore, the challenging nature of Statius' material, presented in a way that defies traditional assumptions about creating unity through the figure of a hero or a single teleology, has left scholars uncertain as to the best way to approach the poem. Pollmann notes: 'Apart from interpretations of the epic as essentially optimistic, or pessimistic, or pluralistic, that is, intentionally offering a variety of possible opinions to the reader, its main theme has been defined as being about power (Dominik), *pietas* (Kytzler), or anti-*pietas* (Pollmann), fury (Hershkowitz, Franchet D'Espèrey), or *ira Iovis* (Rieks), civil war (Ahl), allegory (Feeney), dynastic succession (Hardie) or literature as a form of political escapism (Fuhrmann, Williams, Pollmann).'[54] Although it is clear from this that Statius' epic resists easy categorisation and thematisation, this multiplicity of approaches reflects attempts by scholars to tackle the same issues.

Not enough has been done to reconcile the two apparently opposing worlds of the *Silvae* and the *Thebaid*. The variety and polarity of scholarly opinion has led to two problems in modern thought on Statius. Firstly, modern readers avoid the complications

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[52] Braund (1996a) provides a very positive assessment of Theseus. Ahl (1986); Dominik (1994); Hershkowitz (1998a) 296-301 see many negative qualities hidden within an outwardly positive character.

[53] And this has led many to question and reject the positive appraisal of Domitian in the *Silvae*.

[54] Pollmann (2004) 26. We should add the theme of *humanitas* as presented by Ripoll (1998) and Delarue (2000).

caused by juxtaposing the radically different perspectives of *Thebaid*, *Silvae* and *Achilleid*, and view individual works in isolation. This happens even though we know that composition of the *Silvae* overlapped with the composition of both the epics. Comparisons can be made with Ovid and his simultaneous composition of the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. Secondly, modern appreciation of Statius' *Thebaid* tends to be couched in terms of duality: positive and negative, good and bad, light and dark.[55] Moreover, this notion colours most appreciations of the poem.

Such frames of reference can ignore the subtler characteristics of Statius' poetry, and especially his willingness to challenge and unsettle his most important reader. We should not forget that the emperor was a man well trained in the subtleties of classical poetry. Although Suetonius and Tacitus claim that Domitian's early interest in literature was a sham, Domitian's contemporaries accord him much praise for his technique and ability.[56] Of especial interest for our purposes must be Statius' own appraisal of Domitian's literary abilities (*at tu... | cui geminae florent vatumque ducumque | certatim laurus (olim dolet altera vinci)*, *Ach.* 1.14-16) and Quintilian's enthusiastic endorsement of Domitian's qualities as an *epic* poet (*quid tamen his ipsis eius operibus in quae donato imperio iuvenis secesserat sublimius, doctius, omnibus denique numeris praestantius?*, *IO* 10.1.91). Domitian enjoyed a reputation as a wit, as evidenced (grudgingly) by Suetonius (*Dom.* 20).[57] Such an intelligent, well-read and well-written man would make a perceptive reader of poetry. It seems that Domitian was especially well qualified to read epic poetry in particular. All his extant quotations are from Homer and Virgil.[58] He was a judge at poetic competitions, some of which he instituted himself.[59] His own production included epic

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[55] On the poem's sense of dualism, see Kroll (1932) 450, 453; Feeney (1991) 350-3.

[56] Negative portrayals, Suet. *Dom.* 2.2, 20; Tac. *Hist.* 4.86.2. Positive portrayals, Pliny *NH praef.* 5; Val. Fl. 1.7-20. See Coleman (1986) 3088-91; Morgan (1997) 209. For Domitian as a sponsor of literature, see Coleman (1986) 3095-111.

[57] See Coleman (1986) 3091-2, 3094-5, Morgan (1997) analyses the literary acumen and wit in Domitian's writing and speech. Cassius Dio 67.9.3-5 can be read as one of the funniest and most literal pieces of black humour in the ancient world. I disagree strongly with Jones (1992) 198 according to whom Domitian was: 'completely lacking in a sense of humour.'

[58] See Coleman (1986) 3091 and n.20.

[59] Domitian's Capitoline Games stand out as a conscious attempt to develop Rome as a cultural capital, see Caldelli (1993) and Woolf (2003) 218-21.

poetry, and Statius refers to his ability as a poet in terms (*vatumque ducumque*, *Ach.* 1.15) that suggest epic is foremost in his mind.[60] It would be difficult to pull the wool over such a reader's eyes, and instead I prefer an interpretation which sees Statius deliberately using Domitian's ability to see nuance and detail as an aid with which to get his message across. Any criticism in the *Thebaid* of autocracy, or more specifically of the emperor, subtle or evident, is something that we must assume that Domitian picked up on.

That Domitian was actively engaged in careful readings of contemporary literature is certain. We know that the younger Helvidius was executed for writing a mythological farce that alluded (according to Domitian at any rate) to the emperor's divorce (Suet. *Dom.* 10.4), while Hermogenes of Tarsus was executed for certain double entendres in his histories (Suet. *Dom.* 10.1). Suetonius claims that the copyists of Hermogenes were crucified (*libraris etiam, qui eam descripserant, cruci fixis*, 10.1), a story which certainly puts an interesting spin on Statius' own account of his epic poem's tortuous production (*multa cruciata lima*, *Silv.* 4.7.26). These were not the only men to suffer execution for their literary production under Domitian, but it is interesting to note that both Helvidius and Hermogenes suffer not for what they wrote, but as a result of the emperor's ability to read between the lines of historical and mythological literature.[61] Statius' *Thebaid* cannot be regarded as somehow immune from the perceptive and increasingly paranoid gaze of Domitian. Because of this, we should examine briefly the relative chronology of Domitian's reign and the production of Statius' epic.

The span of Domitian's reign is one that has been characterised since ancient times by paranoid mistrust, tyranny and terror. Analysing this ancient evidence is a task too massive to attempt here, but we will make a few important observations about the nature and character of Domitian as emperor. In 96, Nerva's senators enforced a *damnatio memoriae* on

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[60] On the gemination of *-que*...*-que* as an especially epic motif, see below, p.38.

[61] See Coleman (1986) 3106-12; Jones (1992) esp. 122-3. Morgan (1997) 214 makes the very pertinent observation with regard to Domitian's baldness that I quote selectively as it applies to all facets of his rule that: 'in an emperor rendered progressively *metu saevus* (Suet. *Dom.* 3.2), 'paranoid' (in modern terms), it was a short step from cracking witticisms ... to believing ... that all jokes ... were at his expense.'

Domitian. Nerva's successors ruled Rome until the third century and the death of Septimius Severus in 211 AD. Domitian's status as a tyrant became a defining element in the ideology of Nerva, Trajan and their successors, and it had already been fixed by the time of Marcus Aurelius, who reassigned a Domitianic quip to Hadrian, because, as he put it: *tyrannorum enim etiam bona dicta non habent tantum auctoritatis.*[62] However, another possible interpretation is the picture of a downward trajectory in Domitian's reign from promising beginnings to years of terror before his assassination. Such an interpretation originates with Suetonius' remarks at the opening of his biography: *circa administrationem autem imperii aliquamdiu se varium praestitit, mixtura quoque aequabili vitiorum atque virtutum, donec virtutes quoque in vitia deflexit: quantum coniectare licet, super ingenii naturam inopia rapax, metu saevus.* (Suet. *Dom.* 3.2). The Suetonian narrative of deterioration is still popular today, and the revolt of Saturninus, which began in late 87 or early 88 and continued until Saturninus' death in January 89, is often cited as a major turning point in Domitian's reign.[63] Another possible turning point is 93 AD, the year of the executions of Herennius Senecio and Arulenus Rusticus, which has been cited by historians since Eusebius.[64] We need not see Domitian's character changing over time; Domitian knew that he had all the power in government, and that the Roman imperial aristocracy was becoming an aristocracy of status rather than one of office,[65] and made no secret of his own power. Three major elements characterise Domitian's rule: he was nakedly autocratic: he was remembered as a tyrant: many felt that he got worse as his reign progressed.

Meanwhile, Statius' account of his epic poem's production is remarkably full by ancient standards, but scholars have not fixed exact dates with any degree of certainty. Nauta sensibly takes as a *terminus post quem* Statius' mentions of the *Thebaid* as incomplete at

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[62] SHA *Avid. Cass.* 2.6-7. See Coleman (1986) 3092n.22. Generally, see Jones (1992) 160-3.
[63] Argued for by Syme (1983) 121-7. E.g. Southern (1997) follows this trajectory. Saturninus' revolt has the convenience of falling more or less at the mid-point of Domitian's reign.
[64] Although the persecution of the Christians was what motivated Eusebius' interpretation, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.15-20.
[65] See Hopkins (1983) 176-93; Woolf (2003) 209-12.

Silvae 1.5.8-9 and 3.2.40-1, 142-3.[66] *Silvae* 3.2 cannot be accurately dated, but if we assume that *1.5 on the baths of Claudius Etruscus was written at the same time as Martial 6.42 and* 83, both also addressed to Claudius Etruscus,[67] then a possible date can be constructed. Coleman places these poems: 'between 89 and 90',[68] Shackleton Bailey in: 'the latter half of 90',[69] and Nauta: 'from 90 or 91'.[70] Nauta then takes as his *terminus ante quem* the fact that Statius fails to mention Domitian's successful military campaign against the Sarmatians, and *thus the Thebaid cannot have been published in its final form later than the end of 92, an* analysis with which Coleman concurs.[71] Such evidence is woolly in the extreme, and we can only place final publication of the *Thebaid* to between 91 and 92 AD.

The length of time it took Statius to produce this work is even harder to ascertain. Statius claims that the *Thebaid* was begun under his father's guidance (*Silvae* 5.3.233-7). We can judge the date of Statius' father's death with some degree of certainty to 79.[72] Statius' father died whilst contemplating a poem on the eruption of Vesuvius in August of that year (*Silvae* 5.3.205-8) and Statius' poetic lament for his father may indicate that his *father's planned poem was an immediate reaction to the eruption, although this places a* great deal of reliance on *iamque* (5.3.205) and *cum* (5.3.207). Further difficulties are caused by the irreconcilable chronology of Statius' references to his three months of mourning (5.3.29-31) and his participation at the Alban and Capitoline games.[73] Statius elsewhere claims that his wife was the only witness to the long labour of his *Thebaid* (*Silvae* 3.5.35-6), *and although this suggests that Statius' father had died before the serious work on the poem*

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[66] Nauta (2002) 196 and n.8. See also Coleman (1988) xvi-xvii; Pollmann (2004) 12-13.
[67] We assume that the shared subject matter of *Silvae* 1.5 and Martial 6.42 and 83 indicates a similar date of composition, see White (1975) 275-9. The dating evidence for Martial book 6 is also a little vague. E.g. Vioque (2002) 4-5 indicates that the *terminus ante quem* for the publication of Martial book 6 is the publication of Martial book 7, dated to December 92. Poems 6.4 and 6.10 contain mentions of the emperor and triumphs and Sullivan (1991) 37 dates Book 6 to late 91, possibly December. However, Citroni (1989) dated book 6 to 90-91 AD. For a modern and complete analysis of the dating evidence for Martial, see Vioque (2002) 1-8.
[68] Coleman (1988) xvi.
[69] Shackleton Bailey (2003) 25.
[70] Nauta (2002) 196n.8.
[71] Coleman (1988) xvi-xvii; Nauta (2002) 196n.8.
[72] Although even this date is insecure. Hardie (1983) 13-14 dates the death of the elder Statius to September 90. See Coleman (1988) xviii; Nauta (2002) 195 against this interpretation.
[73] See Coleman (1988) xviii-xix; Nauta (2002) 195-8.

had started, a certain amount of poetic licence is entailed in the context of this remark (*Statius is appealing to her loyalty*). *Again, the evidence is hazy, but a starting date around* 80 AD seems plausible. Thus the poet's convenient claim that his poem took twelve years to complete (*Theb.* 12.811-12) may be broadly accurate. It seems unlikely on the evidence that we have that we can produce a more accurate estimate of the poem's period of composition beyond the span between 78-81 and 91-92 AD. But I see no obvious reason (other than a cynical approach to convenient chronology in the ancient world) why we should not accept Statius at his word and assume that he wrote between say 80 and 92, producing one book per year.[74]

Comparing this writing and publication process to the progress of Domitian's reign is provocative. Statius began work on his epic poem shortly before Domitian acceded to power. Indeed, Statius may have expected to dedicate his work to Titus at the inception of the project and Markus has suggested that the praise of Domitian at the beginning of the *Thebaid* is an addition to an established text that could be inserted or omitted according to *the context of public performance.*[75] *Thus while individual details in Statius' poem may have* been inserted or edited at a very late date in the poem's composition, the broad narrative thrust of the *Thebaid* and must have been in the poet's mind from the beginning.

Two related arguments assist us in reaching such a conclusion. Firstly, Statius' epic is episodic in its structure. The poem does not provide a single Aristotelian direction, a single epic hero, story or quest. Instead, unity is provided by careful interlinking at the micro- and macro-structural levels.[76] The *Thebaid* is a Callimachean project where the effort at honing the fine details (*multa cruciata lima*, *Silvae* 4.7.26) and ensuring that these details *form a consistent set of themes and motifs creates a coherent final product.*[77] *Individual*

[74] Martial, for example, also appears to have written his books of epigrams at an approximate rate of one per year, cf. 10.70. We need not assume that Statius wrote in chronological order although some scholars have done so, see Smolenaars (1994) xviii.
[75] Markus (2003) 443-5.
[76] See Burck (1971) 315; Albrecht (1997) 950; Pollmann (2004) 21-22 with details on micro-structural elements in Book 12, 48-57.
[77] See Brown (1994); Delarue (2000) 117-40.

episodes can be written and re-written, cut and pasted, edited and re-worked, but the major themes of the *Thebaid* must have been in play from the earliest moments of composition.[78]

Secondly, we can see from the relationship between Statius' text and another Flavian epic, Silius' *Punica*, that substantial elements of what became the final text were likely to have been in public circulation long before the final publication date in 91-92 AD.[79] We know that Martial (4.14) was well aware of the *Punica* by 89 AD, suggesting that Silius' earlier books were recited or were in some sense in the public domain. A similar publication process for Statius' epic is possible. That Silius had access to individual books or parts of books of the *Thebaid* before its final publication has been posited by Wistrand and generally accepted.[80] More important for our purposes, Juhnke dated Silius' river battle scene in *Punica* 4 to c.84 AD and Statius' river battle in *Thebaid* 9 to before 88 AD. Dewar concurs, saying that the catalogue of deaths in the Ismenus 'seems designed to surpass the terrors of *Pun.* 4.585-97.'[81] Both scholars place *Thebaid* 9 after *Punica* 4 and before *Punica* 13-14. They also place *Thebaid* 4 before *Punica* 13.[82] There are also good reasons to suggest that Statius may, if we assume that both Statius and Silius wrote in chronological order, have written *Thebaid* 7 after *Punica* 5, and that the description of the earthquake at *Thebaid* 7.794-823 was influenced by *Punica* 5.611-28.[83] The details are complex and they need not concern us directly here, but it seems that composition of the two epic poems overlapped and that substantial elements of the *Thebaid* in something reasonably close to their final form were in circulation several years before Statius completed the project. Given that the details, themes and motifs of the *Thebaid* are built up over its twelve books to form a coherent final composition, the early release of books suggests very strongly that Statius had an overarching plan for the completed poem.

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[78] For example, Bonds (1985) traces the parallels between the duels between Tydeus and Polynices in Book 2 and Eteocles and Polynices in Book 11. Pollmann (2004) 32-6 traces the motif of denied burial through the poem as a whole.
[79] In general on this complicated subject, see Wistrand (1956); Venini (1970) xv-xvi; Juhnke (1972) 12-13; Dewar (1991) xxxi-xxxv; Smolenaars (1994) xvii-xviii; Lovatt (2005) 2-3, 248.
[80] Wistrand (1956) 58.
[81] Juhnke (1972) 12-13; Dewar (1991) xxxi.
[82] Juhnke (1972) 269; Dewar (1991) xxxv.
[83] Smolenaars (1994) xviii.

The implications of this chronology are crucial to the rest of this project. The composition of the *Thebaid* ran parallel to the first twelve years of Domitian's reign. Although some changes in tone and character of the poem may allow for any putative change in the character of the emperor, these cannot have been so great as to alter fundamentally the character of the *Thebaid* itself. We should not see the poem as a reaction to the tyrannical nature of Domitian's regime, although such a perspective certainly colours its reception. It seems that Statius made big decisions on the nature of his poetic project even before Domitian became emperor. The poem was always intended as an epic that presented a critical and pessimistic view of autocracy. Asking what this poem might mean in 80 AD, when Statius began his project, is important. Wider historical contexts and concerns may be of greater relevance than Domitianic tyranny.

Such a context is crucial to our finding a solution to the 'problem of autocracy' that Statius creates for us. It has broader applications beyond the confines of Domitian's principate to include the Flavian dynasty, the civil war of 69 AD that brought that dynasty to power and the changes that had taken place in Rome since Augustus became sole ruler over a hundred years earlier. Finding the solution to this problem was one that confronted not only the readers of the *Thebaid*, but all three Flavian emperors. Thus far we have reached a number of preliminary conclusions, which will inform our discussion for the rest of this project:

1. Statius' literature sets up what I term a 'problem of autocracy'. He presents autocracy in a negative light in the *Thebaid*, yet presents Domitian in all his surviving works in a positive light.
2. No obvious solution to the problem of autocracy is presented. The poem's ending is peculiarly aporetic. This has encouraged multiple and pluralistic interpretations of the poem.
3. Although (traditional) positive and negative interpretations are possible, neither seems to answer this problem adequately.

4. Statius presents the reader with two authority figures, the *Aeneid* and Domitian, who frame the poem and are crucial for its interpretation.
5. Statius and his *Thebaid* are themselves authorities working with and working against the *Aeneid* and Domitian.
6. The *Thebaid* not only negotiates with an authority such as Domitian, it also constructs Domitian's identity as an authority.

We should now outline the scope for the remainder of this chapter. We will explore the nature of Statius' relationship with Domitian and the *Aeneid.* We will demonstrate that the two figures are parallels for one another and that they are interlinked at a fundamental level. What affects Statius' relationship with one impinges upon his interaction with the other. There is a 'didactic' thrust to Statius' *Thebaid,* and this has powerful implications for *Aeneid* as master-text and Domitian as reader. Statius' relationship with the *Aeneid* and with other earlier literature is key to our understanding of this 'problem of autocracy'. Statius re-deploys Virgilian concepts, issues and problems in a new context and examines these through the lens of later poetry. Statius' *Thebaid* is still as much a re-reading and a re-writing of the *Aeneid* as anything else. Intertextual allusion through the prologue and sphragis of the *Thebaid* directs us towards new ways of reading Virgil. Statius encourages us not only to look at Virgil's text afresh but also to look at the *Aeneid* through other texts, and especially through Ovidian re-readings of the *Aeneid.* Understanding how to read Virgil gives us a handle on the problems that Statius sets up.

*3. The Prologue (*Theb. *1.1-45).*

For Statius, the beginning of the *Thebaid* was a place to contemplate the world outside his poem, both the literary world and the political world. In particular, it is one important place where Statius openly contemplates his relationship with the two most

important authorities in his work, the *Aeneid* and the emperor Domitian.[84] Although considerable scholarly effort has gone into analysis of the opening 45 lines of Statius' epic,[85] I believe that some aspects of the 'prologue' have yet to be understood fully. In particular this chapter will explore the connections that the prologue shares with the 'sphragis' at the poem's end (12.810-19) which are routinely recognised but rarely explored.[86] It will also examine the complex relationships that Statius sketches and alludes to between his own work and earlier poetry, especially epic poetry, and particularly the *Aeneid*.[87] In addition, attention will be paid to the way in which this literary self-positioning affects Statius' relationship, or more accurately his poem's relationship with the emperor who gets no mention within the narrative of the epic itself but looms large at either end of the poem, acting as a frame for Statius' work.[88]

The first 45 lines of the poem constitute a prologue in that they fall outside the main narrative world of the poem. The narrative of the epic begins properly with Oedipus' prayer-curse to the gods of the Underworld (1.46). By way of introduction, the poem opens with a brief summary of its themes (1-2) and the poet combines a depiction of his own poetic inspiration with a request to the Muses for a starting-point for his epic within the massive Theban cycle (3-4). Statius rejects an earlier period of Theban history which he summarises in a brief catalogue of events (4-16). Instead, he says, he will limit himself to the troubled house of Oedipus (15-16). Likewise, says Statius, he will not yet dare to undertake a historical epic depicting the life and achievements of the emperor Domitian. A brief plot

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[84] It seems important to separate the epic poem *Aeneid* from Virgil and indeed from the *Georgics* and the *Eclogues*. The poem, rather than the poet, occupies a position of special importance in Statius' poetic conception. The personification of the *Aeneid* is made by Statius at the end of the *Thebaid*, 12.816. The way in which this personification works will be explored much more fully below.

[85] See Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.*; Vessey (1973) 60-7; Vessey (1986) 2966-74; McGuire (1997)71-5; Hershkowitz (1998) 63, 269-72; Heinrich (1999) 169-71; Delarue (2000) 237-8, 420-2; Dominik (2002); Rosati (2002); Markus (2003). Surprisingly, the prologue is referred to more in passing than in detail and Rosati's chapter is something of an exception. Hill (1989) makes many detailed and useful comparisons between later parts of *Thebaid* 1 and *Aeneid* 1, but ignores the prologue bar two brief paragraphs on page 110. Contrast this with the superabundance of work on the ending of the *Thebaid*, see below, p.45.

[86] Cf. e.g. Dietrich (1999) 42; Rosati (2002) 230n.7. Delarue (2000) 237-9 explores links between 1.1-45 and 12.797-809 and regards 1.1-45 and 12.797-819 as 'extradiégétiques'.

[87] A huge topic which informs virtually any examination of the *Thebaid*, see Vessey (1973); Ahl (1986); Hill (1989); Hardie (1989); (1993); (1997); Braund (1996a); Pollmann (2001).

[88] Cf. Dominik (1994) 135-48.

summary of such an epic project is sketched (17-33), but Statius will wait for greater inspiration to match a greater theme (32-33). He returns to his present theme and asks a single Muse, Clio, with which hero of the Seven against Thebes he should begin (33-45), before turning his attention to Oedipus.

The prologue takes the problem of beginnings as its theme. Statius has chosen a subject that has been treated many times before in classical literature, and Statius uses his own beginning to establish his own position within the literary canon. As we consider the implications of this strategy of literary self-positioning, it is worth considering Rosati's examination of the prologue. I quote the concluding paragraph of Rosati's chapter, as it provides a useful summary of his thoughts on this passage:

> 'Thus we find in Statius a significant phenomenon in the context of Latin epic tradition: on the one hand, he brings to completion the process of gradual emancipation of the poet from his divine sources, and from the external authority which traditionally validated his work (that is to say, unlike Homer and Virgil, he has no 'subjects' about which he needs to be informed by a superhuman guarantor). On the other, moving in a direction that is only apparently the opposite one, he revives and emphasises the intervention of a supernatural agent, as the source of inspiration for the poet (a step backwards, that is, compared with Lucan and didactic poetry, which had 'transferred to earth' that abstract authority, recognising it in the *princeps*). At the end of the long struggle that has set them one against the other, the poet has taken away from the Muse that authority that used to be a prerogative of hers. The poet has thus emancipated himself from the Muse's guardianship. But he now uses his newly conquered authority to smuggle back in again, to his advantage, the pretence, the ghost of the Muse...Thanks to the Muse, and to her useful

function of a protective screen, Statius will be able to avoid beginning the work *which power desired to impose upon him.*'[89]

Rosati's thesis is concerned primarily with political pressure placed on Statius by the emperor and the poetic strategies used to deal with this. However, two further areas of interest are suggested by his work. Firstly the authority and pressure that Statius has to deal with is twofold, both political pressure from the emperor and literary pressure from earlier epic poetry, especially the *Aeneid.* Statius seeks emancipation as much from poetic figures of authority as he does from imperial ones. Secondly we should qualify the precise relationship that Statius articulates between himself and his Muse in the light of this (polemical? antagonistic?) relationship with earlier poetry. Almost every moment in the narrative of the poem is imbued with some kind of reference or allusion to the *Aeneid,* whether in terms of language, poetics, structure, characterisation, theme, or a mixture of some or all of these. Thus the poem's opening, as Vessey points out,[90] is surprising in that it appears at first to ignore the *Aeneid* as a primary model:

> fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis
> decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas
> Pierius menti calor incidit. unde iubetis
> ire, deae?
>
> (*Theb.* 1.1-4)[91]

Statius opens his poem with a powerful allusion to Lucan, but the allusion also shows that he is anxious to demonstrate his independence from the Lucanian model.

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[89] Rosati (2002) 251.
[90] Vessey (1973) 60-4; (1986) 2967-71. See also Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.* Lorenz (1968) 4-8 arrives at the (too) extreme conclusion that no intertextual relationship can be established between the openings of the *Aeneid* and *Thebaid.*
[91] On the performative aspects of 1.1-4, see Markus (2003) 434.

Fraternas acies clearly recalls Lucan's *cognatas acies* (*BC* 1.4)[92] and also amplifies it by narrowing the familial relationship to one between twin brothers, and *alterna regna* expands to include the uncle of the brothers, Creon. Statius marks his affiliation to a Lucanian mode of epic storytelling but also indicates the difference between the two. Family will be even more important than in Lucan; the nature of the conflict that Statius narrates will be even worse. Statius expands upon the Ovidian and Lucanian *fert animus* (*Met.* 1.1; *BC* 1.67) with his own *Pierius menti calor incidit* (1.4). Again, Statius programmatically uses Lucan (and Ovid) as his explicit model and again demonstrates a willingness to deviate from that model. Statius' motivation to tell of Thebes is more passionate than those of his predecessors,[93] and he is more explicit about the external origin of his impulse and his own apparently passive role.[94] If Lucan's epic told of conflict worse than civil war (*bella plus quam civilia*, *BC* 1.1), then Statius tells of conflict worse than Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. The *Aeneid* is noticeable by its absence.[95]

Statius follows with a more conventional address (*unde iubetis | ire, deae?* 1.3-4) to the Muses asking for their inspiration. Here we see an obvious connection to the *Aeneid* for the first time, to Virgil's requests to the Muse for enlightenment about the causes of the events he will narrate (*Musa, mihi causae memora*, *Aen.* 1.8) and for the origins of the war against the Latins (*nunc age, qui reges, Erato, quae tempora*, *Aen.* 7.37; *tu vatem, tu, diva, mone*, *Aen.* 7.41). If we view 'escalation' as a key theme in the prologue, we can read Statius' plurality of goddesses as trumping Virgil's single Muse. Such addresses to the Muses for inspiration are clearly a commonplace in classical literature, but Statius' request, as Rosati makes clear, is markedly different from that of Virgil: '[Statius] limits himself to asking the Muse simply about the *ordo* of the narration, about how to start it off... the appeal

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[92] Compare further *Theb.* 1.180-5; Lucan *BC* 8.406-7. Cf. Virgil *Aen.* 7.335-6. See Delarue (2000) 102. Delarue (2000) 181 states that: 'si *fraternas acies*, par sa place, évoque avant tout Lucain, celui-ci est loin d'être seul.' I would rather claim that although fraternal conflict is a common theme in Roman literature, Statius' allusion to Lucan is so pointed as to exclude all voices other than Lucan's.
[93] Hershkowitz (1998a) 63-4, 268-71.
[94] Rosati (2002) 230-1.
[95] Statius similarly uses Homeric models to avoid the oppressive influence of the *Aeneid*, see Juhnke (1972) 123, 180-4, 301-3; Caviglia (1973) 27-8 and criticism in Smolenaars (1994) xxxii-xxxv.

to the *deae* is not, therefore, from the formal point of view, a real *invocatio*, but merely a *request for illumination on a point which is actually a mere detail of narrative economy.*'[96] We should note that Statius' programmatic statement is consistently marked by deviation from the norms that are laid down by his poetic predecessors.

The dilemma in choosing a starting point implicit in *unde* is strongly reminiscent of historiography, where authors such as Thucydides, Polybius, Diodorus Siculus and Sallust all demonstrate that in order to understand one set of events, the real starting point has to be preceded by an earlier one.[97] Statius' interest in causation is as much a historiographic as an epic one, and Statius couches his interest in causation in historiographical terms. When Statius does settle upon a subject for his poem (*limes mihi carminis esto | Oedipodae confusa domus*, 1.16-17) it is intriguing to note that he chooses Clio, the Muse of history, as the Muse who can list for him the seven against Thebes and the manner of their deaths:

> quem primum heroum, Clio, dabis? inmodicum irae
> Tydea? laurigeri subitos an vatis hiatus?
> urguet et hostilem propellens caedibus amnem
> turbidus Hippomedon, plorandaque bella protervi
> Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus.
>
> (*Theb.* 1.41-5)

Statius' choice of Clio marks another profoundly (genre-busting?) lyric moment in the prologue of his epic, alluding to the opening of Horace *Odes* 1.12 (which in turn alludes to Pindar *Olympian* 2).[98] Horace asks Clio to help him find a proper subject for his praises (*quem virum aut heroa... | quem deum?*, *Odes* 1.12.1, 3). The list that follows rejects more traditional and especially epic subject-matter (5-32), and passes rapidly through earlier

[96] Rosati (2002) 232-3.
[97] Thuc. 1.1-23; Poly. 1.2-3; Dio. Sic. 18; Sallust *Cat.* 6-13.
[98] See Delarue (2000) 238; Markus (2003) 446-7. Clio is also the first Muse to speak in Callimachus' *Aetia*.

Romans, including Romulus, Numa, Tarquinius Superbus, Cato, Regulus, the Scauri, L. Aemilius Paulus, Fabricius, M. Curius Dentatus, and Camillus (33-44), all of whom are standard moral *exempla*,[99] before finishing his poem with four standards in praise of his real hero, and Clio's answer we must assume, the emperor Augustus (45-60). Statius inverts the pattern of Horace's poem, rejecting the possibility of praising an emperor in favour of his own mythical narrative. Roman poets could call on any Muse they liked irrespective of the genre of their poetry, but Statius' choice of the Muse of history at such a crucial juncture in the poem seems pointed.[100] Elsewhere, Statius calls upon Calliope, the Muse of epic, and Apollo at various points in the narrative (Apollo at 4.649-51, 6.296-300, both Apollo and Calliope at 8.373-4). In *Silvae* 4.7, Statius refers to Apollo as the inspirer of the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* (4.7.21-30).[101] Statius suggests that his apparently mythological narrative might in fact have a historical impact. It is an impression that is underlined by other Muse-invocations. At the outbreak of fighting in Book 7, Statius' call to the Muses for assistance does not evoke the more traditional universal memory of the Muses (cf. *memora*, *Aen.* 1.7; *meminisse*, *Theb.* 4.33), but asks them to tell of things that they have seen for themselves (*vidistis enim, dum Marte propinquo | horrent Tyrrhenos Heliconia plectra tumultus*, 7.630-1). Eyewitness or autopsy, and the authority it provides to historical narratives, has been identified as a central concern of all ancient historiography Greek and Roman.[102] Such concerns are even anticipated in Odysseus' insistence on his status as eyewitness of the Trojan War and the way in which he equates Demodocus' song inspired by Apollo or the Muses with eyewitness and experience.[103] Yet Statius here performs a subtle sidestep in his presentation of the Muses in that the inspiration they provide is no longer *to be equated* with

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[99] See Nisbet & Hubbard (1970) *ad loc.* On *Odes* 1.12 as an element in the new ideology, see Feeney (1998) 111-13.

[100] Roman poets were not necessarily obliged to address individual Muses with regard to their particular sphere of poetic influence, see *RE* xvi.724; Nisbet & Hubbard (1970) on Horace *Odes* 1.24.3. Statius also invokes Erato, normally Muse of love-poetry, to inspire the lyric poem, *Silvae* 4.7, which is intended to speed up the return of Vibius Maximus from Dalmatia so that he may in turn accelerate Statius' writing of the *Achilleid*, see Coleman (1988). Invoking Erato may itself be a gesture at *Aen.* 7.37.

[101] See Coleman (1988) *ad loc.*

[102] Marincola (1997) 63-86.

[103] *Odyssey* 8.487-91. See Marincola (1997) 63-4 on this passage.

autopsy, rather the Muses *are* Statius' eyewitnesses. The battles are portrayed as historical events. In Book 10, Statius asks Clio to tell him of the suicide of Menoeceus (*memor incipe Clio, | saecula te quoniam penes et digesta vetustas*, 10.630-1). Her authority as Muse of history becomes especially apposite for this story because Statius presents this as a historical event. Statius blurs the boundaries between mythological epic and historical narrative.[104]

Statius uses the relationship with his Muse subtly. Interpreted politically, the Muse is a cover, a pretence of poetic authority that allows Statius to pursue his own poetic choices, specifically a choice of mythological epic.[105] The poet presents us with his two choices, an Ovidian, mythological narrative of Thebes (4-16) and a Domitianic narrative of contemporary, 1st century history. Because of his Muse's instructions, he settles on the former. Yet the Muse does hold an increasing amount of power over the poet and the narrative he tells is in some sense a historical one. The prologue acts out Statius' poetic choices, Ovid and Lucan over Virgil, mythology and Thebes over history, Domitian and Rome. Yet the nature of these two choices is not so neat. Ovid's (Theban) epic is mythological yet Lucan's is historical. Statius ignores Virgil, yet Virgil is omnipresent. Statius avoids historical narrative, yet his appeal goes to the Muse of history. Statius acknowledges as he claims independence that his epic is directed at Domitian as much as it is influenced by Virgil. As Henderson notes: 'Statius' readers would need no explicit mandate to explore ways in which his poem was declaring to them at one and the same moment both that the *Thebaid* was not 'about' their world and that it was not *not* about their world too.'[106] *Thebaid* cannot avoid mimicking the Virgilian combination of historical and mythological. Yet the poet distances himself simultaneously from his two biggest authority figures.

Statius follows his initial request to the Muses with a series of possible starting points in the Theban cycle that are rejected. Hardie and (more fully) Keith demonstrate that

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[104] Blurring of mythological and historical boundaries in Roman epic is, of course, nothing new, and is a particularly prominent feature of pre-Virgilian Roman epic. Statius' beginning with Clio also picks up on Ovid's ending of the *Fasti* with her, *F.* 6.811-12, see Barchiesi (1997b) 205-6.
[105] Rosati (2002) 233.
[106] Henderson (1993) 165.

the *longa retro series*, the tale that goes far back in Theban history and that Statius outlines here, is very much the Theban narrative of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.4-16 almost summarises Ovid *Met.* 2.836-4.603).[107] Furthermore, they show that the phrase *longa retro series* itself imitates Ovid's own summation of his Theban stories (*serieque malorum, Met.* 4.564). Statius' disavowal of these (Ovidian) themes (*Theb.* 1.15-16) itself recalls Ovid framing his Theban narrative as the story of Cadmus' prosperity and grief (*Met.* 3.131-9, 4.564-7). The story that Statius outlines here is distinctively Ovidian. Moreover, the references to foundation (*condentem proelia, Theb.* 1.8) and to Juno (*quod saevae Iunonis opus*, 1.12) in the outline given by Statius demonstrate further opposition to both Ovidian and Virgilian epic. Virgil marks the beginning and end of his epic poem with references to foundation (*dum conderet urbem, Aen.* 1.5; *ferrum adverso sub pectore condit, Aen.* 12.950). Statius' poem will explicitly ignore Cadmean foundings.[108] The figure of angry Juno, so central to the conception of the *Aeneid* and the Theban section of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is radically different in the *Thebaid*, milder and more benevolent, while the vindictive role she played is taken on by Jupiter.[109] Statius stages his rejection of earlier epic themes by referring to and dismissing them at the same time. We should note that Statius in lines 7-16 marks his affiliation to an epic text other than the *Aeneid* and that the affiliation itself is strongly marked by deviation – Statius will *not* be re-telling Ovid's Theban mythology.[110] Instead, we will get a separate part of the Theban cycle, one that Ovid himself summarised (*Met.* 9.403-7).[111] Statius' willingness to set himself limits (*limes mihi carminis esto, Theb.* 1.16) on his poem is itself a break from the established norms of Latin epic tradition. Epic is a genre that (in its idealised form at any rate), as Hardie puts it: 'strives for totality and

[107] Caviglia (1973) 88-90; Hardie (1990) 226n.13; Feeney (1991) 344n.106; Keith (2002) 382-3; (2005). The exception is Amphion, who appears in *Metamorphoses* 6 (6.221, 271, 402). See also Georgacopoulou (1996) 95-6.
[108] Boyle (1993b) 94; Markus (2003) 455-6.
[109] On Juno, see Feeney (1991) 343, 354, 357. On Jupiter, see Hill (1989); (1996); Feeney (1991) 353-5; Dominik (1994) 7-33.
[110] Although cf. Davis (1994); Keith (2005).
[111] See Feeney (1991) 344n.106

completion.'[112] Following his encomiastic mention of Domitian and his deeds (17-33), Statius provides us with a summary of the events he *will* narrate (33-45). Only after 33 lines do we get a really explicit reference to the opening of the *Aeneid* (*satis arma referre*, 33) that is unequivocal in its intertextual affiliation to the Virgilian master-text. The enjambment of *Aonia* heightens this effect, deferring the certainty that Statius will not be singing Italian or Virgilian *arma* just a little longer. Yet even this fleeting allusion is again marked by difference; the *arma* are not accompanied by a *vir* but instead by *tyranni* (34).[113]

Statius strives to give his poem a sense of independence from the crushing weight of the *Aeneid* as a literary model. His most important model is all but set aside in the programmatic opening of his poem. Instead he signals affiliation to two other poetic models, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. Yet even here he displays independence by demonstrating his desire to narrate different stories and to outdo his predecessors. The *Aeneid*, later acknowledged as the most important literary influence on Statius' work, is doubly displaced, firstly by two exemplars of post-Virgilian epic, but also by Domitian. Lines 17-33 form an unusual kind of *recusatio* in excusing Statius for producing, not a lighter form of poetry, but the wrong kind of epic.[114] The passage is particularly close in form to a passage in Lucan (*BC* 1.33-66).[115]

Statius does not yet dare (*nondum...| ausim*, 1.17-18) to produce an epic on Domitian's achievements (*Itala signa*, 17-18, are implicitly compared with *arma Aonia*, 33-4, cf. *Ach.* 1.14-19). His repeated allusions to a historical epic on Domitian that never materialises is similar to Tacitus' promise of a contemporary history of Trajan (*Hist.* 1.1.4),[116] thus marking his affiliation to a mythological narrative plan that Clio will ensure is an effective substitute for historical epic. His final promise to Domitian of a historical epic (*tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro | facta canam*, 1.32-33) is tinged by darker overtones. Statius recalls the end of the first book of Virgil's *Georgics* (*et tempus veniet,*

[112] Hardie (1993) 1.
[113] Contrast *acta viri* in the opening lines of the *Achilleid*, 1.3.
[114] See Rosati (2002) 234-8.
[115] See Dewar (1994) on this passage in Lucan.
[116] See above, p.17.

Geo. 1.493), where the poet recalls the horrors of civil war in very physical, historiographical terms.[117] For Virgil, these civil wars were *Romanas acies* (1.490), a clear inspiration to both Lucan (*cognatas acies*) and Statius (*fraternas acies*). Yet Statius spins this depressing Virgilian image in his favour. The dark tale of civil war is that of mythological Thebes, not historical Rome. He anticipates *Romanas acies* depicting Domitian's successful foreign conquests. Statius' decision to write a mythological rather than historical epic may even be a deliberate move in Domitian's favour. Statius realises that his emperor has less to lose and more to gain from the *Thebaid.* Domitian is less vulnerable to criticism and learns more from Statius' Thebes.[118]

The poet attempts to draw a sharp contrast between historical and mythological epic in his *recusatio* to Domitian. Statius is clearly expected to produce a Domitianic epic but fails to do so. His programmatic opening is again marked by affiliation to other models (mythological rather than historical perhaps) and Statius' choice of theme and subject-matter (imposed, so he claims, by the Muses) is unexpected. We should note that the putative epic about Domitian's deeds and the *Aeneid* fulfil similar functions in Statius' prologue. Yet in reality the lines are blurred. Categories of historical and mythological are interwoven in Statius' epic conception.

The quadruple catalogue in the prologue also provides us with a schematic for Statius' poetic choices. We open with a list of the general set of themes (1-2, *-que... -que*) that form the subject-matter of Statius' poem.[119] Statius then gives three catalogues of events of roughly equal length which represent his choices in deciding how to explore these themes.

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[117] Virgil speaks of re-viewing Philippi (*iterum videre*, 1.490) and of a farmer ploughing up spears, helmets and bones (1.494-7), the very physical remains of battle. The farmer in effect becomes another eyewitness of civil war.

[118] Statius' double avoidance of Ovidian mythology and Domitianic epic anticipates a similar sidestep by Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.24, who deliberately omits an account of Augustus from his Julio-Claudian history. Syme (1958) 371 takes this as a reference to an old project which might be resurrected under the greater freedom of Trajan's principate, but the seriousness of Tacitus' intention is unclear.

[119] The correlative *-que* was revived by Ennius on the model of the Homeric –τε...–τε: see Rudd (1989) on Horace *AP* 73; Conte (1992) 152-3; Wills (1996) 372-7. Further to the latter discussion, it could be argued that *-que* is used in Latin epic as a marker of a poem's subject-matter, recalling, cf. *arma virumque*, Vir. *Aen.* 1.1; *regumque ducumque*, Hor. *AP* 73; *primaque ab origine*, Ov. *Met.* 1.3; *cognatasque acies*, Luc. *BC* 1.4; *patiturque*, Sil. *Pun.* 1.2. The comparative length of Statius' list indicates the superabundance of subject-matter he faces.

Lines 1-2 suggest the ambiguity that Statius sketches further in the remaining part of his prologue. We only receive confirmation that Thebes is his subject at the very last word of the second line. The reader (especially Domitian) of *Thebaid* 1.1-2 might, until its final word, have expected a historical, civil war epic and not an Ovidian mythology, especially in the light of Statius' allusions to Lucan. I would suggest that this is itself an Ovidian game, mimicking the epic tone of *Amores* 1.1.1-2 (compare *fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis | decertata odiis sontesque, Theb.* 1.1-2 with *arma gravi numero violentaque bella, Am.* 1.1.1 and *evolvere, Theb.* 1.2 with *parabam | edere, materia, Am.* 1.1.1-2).[120] Statius' epic, like Ovid's elegy, opens by pretending to be something that it is not, a historical epic. The fifteen line passage that follows describes earlier Theban history as presented by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (4-16). A seventeen line passage describes the deeds of Domitian in an encomiastic manner which clearly alludes to Lucan's praise of Nero (17-33). Yet Statius also rejects these Ovidian and Lucanian models in favour of his own distinct narrative (33-45).[121] The catalogue format gives the prologue a feel more closely associated with lyric poetry than epic,[122] a Pindaric edge that resurfaces in the sphragis that concludes the poem.[123] Statius links his epic with lyric again in the *Silvae* (*si tuas cantu Latio sacravi, | Pindare, Thebas*, 4.7.7-8). As well as lyric overtones, Statius' catalogues have the feel of 'tables of contents' from ancient historiographical works. *Thebaid* 1.33-45 suggest a summary of the main events of the poem, much like the précis of Appian, Pliny the Elder and Josephus.[124] Again, Statius anticipates Tacitus in creating a dramatic, passion-fuelled list that is thematic as much as it is informative, enticing the reader into delving into Statius' own 'disaster narrative'.[125]

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[120] On the epic qualities of *Amores* 1.1.1-2, see Barchiesi (1997a) 23.
[121] Markus (2003) 443-4 divides the prologue up differently (4-17, 18-40, 41-5), but notes a similar effect.
[122] See Markus (2003) 443-4.
[123] See below, p.45.
[124] See Damon (2003) *ad Hist.* 1.2-3 and her brief discussion of Appian *praef.* 14-15; Pliny *NH praef.* 33; Josephus *BJ* 1.19-29.
[125] The phrase is from Woodman (1988) 167. For colour, cf. *flammas...caerula...rubuit*, for passion, cf. *furiis...horruit...inmodicum irae...turbidus...alio horrore.*

Statius plays on our expectations. We may expect an epic poem based on the *Aeneid*, and indeed I would suggest that Statius' deliberate avoidance of a Virgilian opening is evidence that Statius' audience also expected such an opening. However, at least until line 45, we get an epic which appears to be closer in form and subject-matter to the epics of Ovid and Lucan. We expect an epic poem that celebrates the deeds and achievement of the emperor. Again, I would suggest that this expectation was something that existed not only for Domitian himself, but also for all of Statius' audience. Moreover, an epic following the form of the *Aeneid* would be expected to include material in praise of the emperor, whether the material was expressed in a directly historical epic narrative or it was presented more obliquely. However, we get a poem that hides away from explicit contemporary or political statement of any kind outside the first 34 and the final 10 lines. Just as the *Aeneid* is conspicuous by its absence in the prologue, so Domitian is conspicuous by his absence in the narrative proper of the *Thebaid* (yet another difference from the *Aeneid* where Augustus makes multiple appearances). Domitian and *Aeneid* share similar roles in Statius' poetic conception, they are figures of authority, both seemingly overwhelmingly powerful ones, against whom Statius struggles to remain independent. Both are potential sources for poetic inspiration; Domitian would effectively become Muse, were Statius to write a poem charting his deeds.[126] The important difference is that while the *Aeneid* is more or less absent in the prologue, it will be a pervasive presence in the rest of the poem. Meanwhile Domitian, such a dominant presence in the prologue, will not reappear (at least explicitly) until the sphragis at the poem's conclusion. The independence that Statius seeks from sources of political power is matched by a desire to gain independence from sources of literary power.

4. The Role of the Muses.

The similarities implicit in the way in which Statius presents or avoids presenting these authorities suggests that we might look again at the relationship he has with the Muses.

[126] See Rosati (2002), especially 246-9.

The invocation of Muses is in itself a marker of literary affiliation. In Augustan and earlier imperial poetry, we can trace a process where the figures that poets traditionally call upon for inspiration, the Muses, are supplanted by the figure of the emperor (or a closely related person, e.g. Germanicus) in the prologues and programmatic passages in that poetry.[127] Statius' reintegration of the Muses into his prologue indicates an assertion of the poet's independence from political and specifically imperial authority.[128] It allows him to make a second *recusatio* and avoid historical epic. Yet it may also mark a sense of independence from literary authority, comparable to Ennius' introduction of the Greek Muses in place of the Camenae (Enn. *Ann.* fr.1 Sk). For Ennius, the (novel)[129] introduction of the Muses marked a Hellenising transformation where Greek metre and form replaced Italian.[130] For Statius, the (hackneyed) introduction of the Muses marks not only his rejection of imperial themes in favour of mythological, but also a rejection of *Roman* themes in favour of Greek, and *Virgilian* themes in favour of Statian. The poet's turning away from the traditional (i.e. Virgilian) themes of Latin epic is more totalising than we might at first realise.[131]

Rosati categorises the Muse as a cover for Statius. The poet craves independence from the dictates of political power and uses the authority of the Muse as an excuse to present the epic that *he* wants to write. The Muse is, in the prologue, only a source of information not inspiration. Yet the poet-Muse relationship in this prologue may be more open than Rosati is prepared to concede. While we may conclude that Statius exercises control over and independence from the Muses, it seems less certain that Statius: 'does not want to receive any information from this external, supernatural agent about the contents of

[127] See Rosati (2002) 240-5 on Tib. 2.1.35; Virg. *Geo.* 1.40; Ov. *Fasti* 1.3-6, 15-20; Manilius *Astronomica* 1.7-10; *Phaen.* 1-4, 15-16; Lucan *BC* 1.63-7; Cal. Sic. 4.82-6; *AP* 9.572 [Lucillius].
[128] Hardie (1983) 30; Dominik (2002); Rosati (2002); Markus (2003) 435-6.
[129] Although see Hinds (1998) 58-63. Cf. the Lucretian invocations of the Muses, *DRN* 1.926-30, 4.1-5.
[130] See Skutsch (1968) 3-4; (1985) 144; Hinds (1998) 56-7; Morgan (2004) 14.
[131] Other, more explicit, re-workings of Ennius' importation of the Muses are to be found at Lucr. *DRN* 1.117-19 and Virg. *Geo.* 3.10-12. See Hinds (1998) 52-63; Gale (2000) 11-14; Nelis (2004) 80-5. Hinds (1998) 55 reads Virg. *Geo.* 3.10-11 as part of a wider contemporary construction of Ennius as an 'archaic' poet and Virgil as belonging to a 'new period' of literature. Statius' 're-awakening' of the Muses may constitute a similar attempt to distinguish between literary eras.

his song, which are already clear in his mind.'[132] The Muse presents Statius with information, catalogues, lists from which Statius can make his poetic choices. The poet has autonomy, but uses the Muse as a kind of poetic search engine. Statius consults the Muses throughout the poem, and his practice elsewhere can inform our reading of his prologue.

On eight occasions during the narrative, Statius calls upon an individual Muse, Apollo or the Muses as a group for help in writing his epic. The various invocations of deities demonstrate that Statius is clear about his poetic choices, but as the poem progresses we move closer to a situation where Statius requires the inspiration of the Muses (rather than using them as a source of information, to heighten tension, create narrative delay, etc.). The relationship with the Muses is thus a cumulative process whereby Statius' apparent emancipation is gradually eroded and he becomes increasingly dependent upon external forces.

At the beginning of book 4 (32-8), Statius calls upon *Fama* and *Vetustas* to give him a list of the Argive warriors (*pande viros*, 4.34). The listing that these two personifications perform is presented in a similar way to the way in which Statius describes his own epic production in the *Silvae* (*pandere Thebas*, *Silv.* 3.2.40).[133] Similarly Statius instructs Calliope (*molire*, *Theb.* 4.37) to list details: the groups, the arms and the cities left empty by the gathering of the army (*quas... quae... | quantas*, 35-6).[134] Despite the trappings of poetic inspiration (*prior ... arcana ... cui curae ... nemoris regina sonori ... sublata lyra ... hausto de fonte*) this is a simple request for information. Later in Book 4 (649-51), Statius makes a similar request to Apollo for information regarding the reasons for delay of the Argive forces in Nemea. Again, Statius requests the details of the delay (*quis iras... unde morae... quis error*). This may be something of a joke on Statius' part: requesting information on the delay will only perpetuate the delay (in narrative terms) still further. The poet acknowledges that he has choices in the tradition of the aetiology (*nos rara manent*

[132] Rosati (2002) 232. Cf. also Georgacopoulou (1996) 181n.45: 'Le narrateur prend ses distances même envers les Muses. Il ne place pas son sujet sous l'égide des *deae*.' *Pace* Schetter (1960) 19-21; Delarue (2000) 217.
[133] Cf. Kytzler (1996).
[134] For a similar theme, see Lucan *BC* 1.419-65.

exordia famae, 651), but these are in the detail. We can see a similar approach to the invocations at 6.296-300 (asking Apollo for details of runners and riders before the chariot race),[135] 7.628-31 (asking the Muses for details of battles which they saw),[136] and 9.315-17 (asking the Muses for reasons why Hippomedon fought the river god Ismenus).[137] All these invocations share similarities with the programmatic invocations in the *Aeneid*, but Statius sets his own limits upon what the Muses can tell him (cf. *limes mihi carminis esto*, 1.16). He asks for details, not for an overarching narrative.

As the battle narrative progresses, Statius increasingly loses his sense of independence over his Muses and increasingly requires actual external inspiration in order that he may write of the excessive deeds of the seven against Thebes and their opponents. In Book 8, Statius calls upon Apollo and Calliope for assistance in describing the general melée in terms which sound much more like a request for inspiration (*alias nova suggere vires | Calliope, maiorque chelyn mihi tendat Apollo*, 8.373-4). Statius recalls Propertius' famous negation of epic inspiration: *non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo* (2.1.3). Statius asserts the primacy of 'proper' epic.[138] Yet the only sense in which Statius remains in control of his own poem is that wars and not the Muses call him (*sed iam bella vocant*, *Theb.* 8.373). By Book 10, the Muse-poet relationship shifts even further and as Statius again calls Clio for help, the power he accords her seems to be very close indeed to a traditional idea of external inspiration (*neque enim haec absentibus umquam | mens homini transmissa deis, memor incipe Clio*, 10.629-30). The phrase is ambiguous; does the *mens* to which Statius refers equate to knowledge or passion?[139] Only two hundred lines later we receive an answer. The feat of narrating Capaneus' attack upon the gods is beyond the scope of normal poetry, Statius requires the Muses to give him a greater madness:

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[135] On this invocation as a claim to superiority over Homer and Virgil, see Lovatt (2005) 15-16.
[136] See Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*
[137] On 9.315-17, see Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*
[138] Calliope is the 'right' Muse to invoke in that her domain is epic poetry, but calling upon Calliope at this point also goes against the Virgilian grain if one remembers Virgil's invocation of Erato, Muse of amatory poetry in the incongruous context of *Aen.* 7.37.
[139] *OLD* s.v. *mens*, 4b 'as the instrument or seat of memory', 6 'as experiencing emotions'.

non mihi iam solito vatum de more canendum;

maior ab Aoniis poscenda amentia lucis:

mecum omnes audete deae!

(*Theb.* 10.829-31)[140]

There is an irony in that, after a very unconventional *recusatio*, Statius sees fit to invoke the help of the Muses for an account of a gigantomachy.[141] Often in Roman poetry, especially elegy, a *recusatio* will use Gigantomachy to represent all epic subject matter. As the narrative becomes increasingly excessive and dramatic, Statius requires an increasing level of input from the Muses. The invocations of Book 10 form parallels with the (non-) invocations in the prologue. In both instances Clio is named in connection with the death of a hero (1.41-5; 10.628-31). Statius' appeal to the Muses before Capaneus' death mimics his question to them at the beginning of the poem (*unde iubetis | ire deae?*, 1.4; *mecum omnes audete deae!*, 10.831),[142] the use of gerundives is repeated (*ploranda... canendus*, 1.44-5; *canendum...poscenda*, 10.829-30). Finally the Aonian goddesses are invited to tell of Aonian arms (*arma... | Aonia*, 1.33-4; *maior ab Aoniis poscenda amentia lucis*, 10.830; cf. 7.629-30).

This rapid review of Statius' invocations of the Muses shows that we should be more cautious of Rosati's interpretation of the poet-Muse relationship in the prologue. Statius does indeed ask for details and information in the prologue, but his apparent autonomy is gradually undermined during the course of the epic, until he requires the madness of the Muses to complete his work. Statius may choose his poem's direction, he still depends upon the Muses, requiring their knowledge before he can make that choice.

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[140] On both passages in Book 10, see Williams (1972) *ad loc.*; cf. also Vessey (1973) 222; for the latter passage as part of a poetics of madness in the *Thebaid*, see Hershkowitz (1998) 63-4.

[141] For Capaneus as giant and his assault on the heavens as a Gigantomachy, see Lovatt (2005) 128-38.

[142] *Cf. also the parallel with 1.16-17 nondum...| ausim. Statius dares to tell of Capaneus' impiety but* not of Domitian's deeds.

Moreover, the Muses present him with catalogues containing information of what possible *epic subjects might look like.*

*5. The sphragis (*Theb. *12.810-19).*

The twin figures of *Aeneid* and Domitian appear at the end of the *Thebaid.* Unlike the prologue (relatively speaking), the ending of the poem has attracted an enormous quantity of scholarly research in recent years.[143] This discussion does not intend to encompass all aspects of the *Thebaid*'s multiplicity of endings,[144] but instead will zoom in on the final 10 lines of the poem and the connection that they have with the poem's prologue:

> durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes,
> *o mihi bissenos multum vigilata per annos*
> Thebai? iam certe praesens tibi Fama benignum
> stravit iter coepitque novam monstrare futuris.
> iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar,
> Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuventus.
> vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta,
> sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.
> mox, tibi si quis adhuc praetendit nubila livor,
> *occidet, et meriti post me referentur honores.*
>
> (*Theb.* 12.810-19)

[143] See Schetter (1960) 150-1; Vessey (1986) 2974-6; Hardie (1993) 110-11; Henderson (1993) 163-4; Dominik (1994) 167-76; Malamud (1995); Braund (1996a); Nugent (1996) 70-1; Hardie (1997); McGuire (1997) 240-1; Hershkowitz (1998a); Hinds (1998) 91-6; Dietrich (1999); Fantham (1999); Lovatt (1999); Dominik (2002); Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.* Elements of what follows are based on these scholarly texts and for the sake of brevity I keep subsequent references to these to a minimum.
[144] See Braund (1996a).

The structure of this epilogue is carefully arranged.[145] Statius questions the future for his work, now presented as a feminine personification, *Thebais*, in tentative terms (810-11), but balances this with a more confident assessment of the recent past (812-13). The poem already has enthusiastic readers and includes the emperor Domitian in its audience (814-15). Statius wishes his poem well, but forbids her to follow too closely in the footsteps of another poem, the divine *Aeneid* (816-17). Finally, Statius looks forward to the future with some confidence that his poem will be paid the honour it deserves (818-19). Connections between prologue and sphragis are obvious. Both are the only places that mention Domitian. Both are concerned with literary predecessors and literary self-positioning. We are reminded of the promise that Statius made to sing Italian standards (*Itala signa*, 1.17-18) as the poem is learnt by the Italian youth (*Itala iuventus*, 12.815; cf. 1.21). Domitian and *Aeneid* swap roles. Where Statius referred reverentially to his emperor (*tuque, o Latiae decus addite famae*, 1.22) he now reveres *Aeneid* (*divinam Aeneida*, 12.816) in terms normally reserved for an imperial subject.[146] Where we might expect focus on Domitian as the object of praise, Statius unexpectedly shifts his focus to his poem's relationship with the *Aeneid*. Statius apparently assumes the role of *dominus*, one more readily associated with Domitian.[147] Emperor and master-text are woven together in the poem's conclusion. It is unclear whether Statius expects *honores* from Domitian, the *Aeneid*, or both.[148]

The final element in Statius' poem is a masterpiece of dense intertextual allusion. Woolf has described the opening six lines of the *Thebaid* as: 'an assault course of allusion.'[149] The last ten lines go even further. The poet integrates an array of *topoi*, references and allusions into his good will message to his poem. Reading such a network of allusions can be a bewildering experience, and it will be worth summarising briefly the

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[145] See Hardie (1997) and Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.* For similar promises of immortality in Neronian and Flavian epic, cf. Lucan *BC* 9.961-9; 980-6; Valerius *Argo.* 2.242-6; *Achilleid* 1.1-7; Silius *Pun.* 2.696-7; 13.778-97. See also Häussler (1978) 58n.100. For a general overview of the sphragis in ancient literature, see Kranz (1961).

[146] See Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.* Cf. 1.24-31.

[147] Although cf. p.71.

[148] For Domitian as a source of honours for poetry, cf. *Silv.* 3.1, 4.2 with Nauta (2002) 196, 335-6. For hope for recognition from *Aeneid*, see *Theb.* 10.445-8 with Pollmann (2001).

[149] Woolf (2003) 207.

references that Statius makes, and in so doing also summarising some of the valuable work that recent scholarship has achieved in reference to this passage. The poem's conclusion serves to distance the work from its most important and powerful model, the *Aeneid*. The conclusion also acts as a link to the prologue, again raising the issue of the poem's place in its historical context, especially in relation to Domitian, and in its literary context, in particular with reference to the *Aeneid* and the poetry of Ovid. The double sense of affiliation to and distancing from Virgil's master work is neatly summarised by Henderson:

> 'The *Thebaid* 'ends', as we saw, by explicitly representing itself as a successor to Virgil's *Aeneid*. In this very gesture of filiation and affiliation to the Augustan epic, the Flavian poem marks out a challenging difference from Virgil's epic *decorum*. If we 'conclude' that Statius stages his work as an emulation, a challenge, a remaking of the classical tradition, we may find that the reverential disciple has *undone* the master-text by taking over the original, redirected it towards quite other ends.'[150]

The split-personality of the ending passage, confident and uncertain, independent and subservient, subversive and conforming, is encoded within it through a series of intertextual references to earlier poetry. The choice of a sphragis as the final end point[151] of the poem serves to separate *Thebais* from *Aeneid* (and Homeric epic). Statius chooses the form of ending used by Virgil in his *Georgics* and, most importantly, by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. Both of these poems are epic works, yet both are utterly different in character from the master-text that is the *Aeneid*.[152] The choice of *bissenos...per annos* for the unmetrical *duodecim* creates further rivalry with Virgil, who is said to have required only

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[150] Henderson (1993) 188.
[151] Statius from 11.573 onwards runs through the full gamut of possible endings for his poem before finally concluding with this one, see Braund (1996a).
[152] On the epic qualities of the *Georgics*, see Morgan (1999) s.v. '*Georgics*, epic characteristics of'. The sphragis ending of the *Metamorphoses* has its own non-epic precedents in Horace *Odes* 3.30 and Ovid *Amores* 3.15.19-20. Cf. also *Tristia* 3.7.49-54. See Hardie (1997) 157.

eleven years to compose the *Aeneid.*[153] Once again, this is a motif from historiography, where the effort required to produce historical writing is proverbial throughout antiquity.[154] Yet Statius' use of a temporal idea to express the notion that his epic is exceptionally polished may also remind us of Ovid's *Fasti* and in particular his own review of the *Fasti* in the *Tristia*:

> ne tamen omne meum credas opus esse remissum,
> *saepe dedi nostrae grandia vela rati.*
> sex ego Fastorum scripsi totidemque libellos,
> cumque suo finem mense volumen habet,
> idque tuo nuper scriptum sub nomine, Caesar,
> et tibi sacratum sors mea rupit opus;
>
> (Ovid *Tristia* 2.547-52)

Statius' work is also compared to a ship (*Theb.* 12.809) and is a twelve book project written for and directed at the emperor Domitian (*Theb.* 1.22 and 12.814). Ovid's *Fasti*, another poetic work likened to a ship and written for Germanicus (*Fasti* 1.3) and Augustus (*Fasti* 2.15), was cut from unmetrical *duodecim* to *sex... totidemque*. Statius' more modest craft anxiously hopes for the *meriti... honores* that Ovid never received.[155]

The sphragis contains reminiscences of a whole gamut of Augustan and later poetry. Statius' desire for a long life for his poem (810-12) reworks a common *topos* in both Greek and Roman poetry,[156] but Statius' address to his poem is particularly reminiscent of Horace's ending of books 2 and 3 of the *Odes* (2.20, 3.30) and book 1 of the *Epistles* (1.20), on which more in a moment. The personification of his own poem as the feminine *Thebais* imitates the personification of the book in Horace's *Epistles* and in Ovid's *Tristia* 1.1 and 3.1. Such an

[153] See Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.*
[154] See Marincola (1997) 148-58, and compare again *Silvae* 4.7.26, *cruciata*.
[155] See Barchiesi (1997b) 197-8.
[156] Cf. e.g. Pindar *Olympian* 6.105; Apollonius *Argo.* 4.1773-5; Enn. *Ann.* 1 fr. 11Sk; Catullus 1; Horace *Odes* 3.30; Propertius 1.22; Luc. *BC* 9.980-6.

allusion to the *Tristia* is also suggestive of a discourse with the emperor, an opportunity which is concretised in 814. We are prompted to compare the relationships of Ovid and Horace with Augustus and Statius with Domitian.

The image of Domitian reading the *Thebaid* (*iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar*, *Theb.* 12.814) is paralleled by a similar image of Domitian reading a poem in the dedicatory epigram which opens Martial's fifth book (cf. esp. Mart. 5.1.9-10). It appears that Statius, in comparison to Martial, exudes confidence. He not only resolutely sets himself against the Virgilian model but his poem is also already being read by Caesar (*dignatur noscere Caesar*, 12.814), unlike Martial's book of epigrams, which was still hoping for an imperial audience on publication (*tu [Caesar] tantum accipias*, Mart. 5.1.9). Similarly, Statius shows more confidence than Martial that Fame will be accorded to his poem in his lifetime as Domitian reads a contemporary work (Martial 5.10.1-2 *esse quid hoc dicam vivis quod fama negatur | et sua quod rarus tempora lector amat?*). Yet that confidence is undermined by the questioning of his poem's future (12.810-11 lacks the overwhelming confidence of Horace *Odes* 3.30 or Lucan *BC* 9.980-6 for example), and the confidence in his relationship with Domitian is undercut by the reminder of Ovid's relationship with Augustus whilst in exile. Statius implicitly links the future success of his poem to a discourse with the emperor.

Statius' exhortation to his poem to live (*vive precor*, 12.816) calls to mind three further Ovidian intertexts that illustrate his concern for addressing the emperor and his (and his poem's) relationship with the emperor. Ovid reminds us of the anniversary of Augustus' acceptance of the title Pontifex Maximus on the 6th March 12 BC by celebrating his role as head of the Vestal Virgins (*Fasti* 3.415-28). Ovid prays that both the fires of Vesta and emperor live undying (cf. *Theb.* 1.30-1). This passage has two distinct effects: it has an entirely optimistic feel about its prayer for the future (whether we interpret this optimism as genuine or otherwise) and it connects the emperor with the subject-matter of the poem.

Augustus and the religious aetiology of the *Fasti* are intertwined at a verbal level (*vivite inexstincti, flammaque duxque, precor, Fasti* 3.428).[157]

Yet Statius' exhortation to his poem mimics more closely two passages from Ovid's *Tristia*. In poem 4.4, Ovid directs a prayer for clemency at the emperor (*forsitan hanc ipsam, vivam modo, finiet olim, | tempore cum fuerit lenior ira, fugam. | nunc precor hinc alio iubeat discedere, si non | nostra verecundo vota pudore carent, Trist.* 4.4.47-50). Ovid prays that he himself may live for a time so that his exile may be revoked before his death or that at least he may be transferred to a more salubrious location. His prayer is marked by its respect and modesty (*verecundo...pudore*, 50) and he invokes Augustus' mercy in this matter (*in Augusto clementia*, 53). Earlier in the collection, Ovid had reflected upon his *Metamorphoses* (1.7.15-40), claiming that he had burnt them because of the poem's as yet unfinished state (*quod adhuc crescens et rude carmen erat*, 1.7.22) but other copies had survived (1.7.19-24). Ovid now wishes his epic poem success and does so in similar language to that used by Statius of the *Thebaid* (*nunc precor ut vivant et non ignava legentem | otia delectent admoneantque mei*, 1.7.25-6). The connection is even more potent as Ovid concludes his exile poem with a six-line passage that he directs his readers to attach to the beginning of his *Metamorphoses* (1.7.35-40) which casts Ovid as parent (*parente suo*, 35) and figures his exile as his funeral (*quasi de domini funere rapta sui*, 38).[158]

Statius constructs his wish that his poem live by incorporating a series of intertextual references to Ovid's relationship with Augustus. The Ovid-Augustus relationship becomes a

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[157] *Fasti* 3.428, *flammaque duxque*, the final line on the 6th March, has a programmatic quality to it that gestures towards epic poetry. See above, p.38. Martial adopts a similar strategy in his (post-*Thebaid*) encomium of the new emperor, Nerva (11.4). The poem marks Nerva's third consulship and works to intertwine religious context (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, 11.4.3-4, consular records as kept in the temple of Janus, 11.4.5-6, *precor ore pio*, 11.4.6) with imperial praise. Martial's poem also has a didactic element and (unlike the passage in the *Fasti*) advocates a reciprocal and protective relationship between emperor and Senate (*hunc omnes servate ducem, servate senatum; | moribus hic vivat principis, ille suis*, 11.4.7-8). These two passages use the same *vive-precor* combination as those we read above, yet the end result is entirely different. Crucially, both passages work to involve their addressee, the emperor, within the fabric of the text itself.

[158] Ovid plays with beginnings and endings, and this species of sphragis in one poem becomes a prologue of another poem. Note also how Ovid refers to himself as his poem's master (*domini*, 1.7.38, cf. *Theb.* 12.810). For the common figure of exile as death in antiquity, see Cicero *ad Q. fr.* 1.3.1; Wistrand (1968) 6-26; Nagel (1980) 35; Doblhofer (1987) 166-8; Williams (1994) 12-13 and his multiple references to Ovid's exile poetry.

model for the Statius-Domitian relationship. Yet Statius' allusion to this other poet-emperor relationship is double-edged. Domitian can be for Statius the emperor that Ovid praises unreservedly in the *Fasti*, or he can be the unrelenting ruler depicted in Ovid's exile poetry. The implication is that Domitian's reception of the poem, how he reads it, is crucial to the poem's future. This is more than saying that Domitian as patron can bestow or prevent success for the *Thebaid*. As we will see below, Statius' characterisation of Domitian in the sphragis is near identical to the potentially destructive *Aeneid*. Furthermore, the educational element, one that we will demonstrate is an implicit component of Statius' poem, is vital to the poem's success in the face of a potentially destructive Domitian. He must read and profit from Statius' poem.

The negotiation of a position in relation to the emperor is paralleled in Statius' use of the sphragis to negotiate a position in relation to the *Aeneid*. As well as invoking a series of model texts that are distinctive by being different from martial epic poetry (mythological epic, didactic epic, lyric, elegy), Statius also considers themes which are more appropriate to the conclusions of especially lyric poetry. Ending with a prayer (*vive precor*, 816) is a common feature in Greek lyric.[159] The sphragis itself as a strategy for asserting the value of the song and the skill of the poet is something that originates in Greek lyric poetry.[160] Yet the awareness of limitations, another theme common to the ends of epinician poetry in particular is one that Statius invokes as he urges restraint upon his poem (816-17). As Rutherford comments: 'more usually *epinikia* end with a narrower vision of limits: the hero has achieved the ultimate, and he should go no further, and neither should the poem.'[161] Statius takes this idea of hero and poem and in his sphragis he merges heroine and poem into one entity, *Thebais*, whose human limitations are contrasted with 'divine *Aeneid*' (816). Lyric often uses the theme of the triumphant homecoming as a closural device, and Statius skilfully interweaves this theme with the notion of poetic reception, so that his *Thebais* will

[159] Cf. e.g. Pindar *Olympian* 8.86-9; 13.115-6; *Pythian* 8.98-100. See Rutherford (1997) 44-6. Statius regarded Pindar as the most important of the lyric poets (*tuque, regnator lyricae cohortis...* ||| *Pindare*, *Silv.* 4.7.5-8.
[160] Cf. esp. Pindar *Nemean* 8.45-53, see Rutherford (1997) 46-8.
[161] Rutherford (1997) 51, see also 51-3.

receive the due honours (*meriti honores*, 819) of the victor.[162] Statius shifts the identity of his epic poem away from the epic genre identified above all with the *Aeneid* and gives it an air more akin to lyric poetry.

The sense of distance from the *Aeneid* already suggested by the very choice of sphragis as a concluding format is further emphasised by the intratextual reference to *Thebaid* 11.574-9.[163] This passage is an address by Statius to the shades of Eteocles and Polynices following their mutual slaughter. Statius breaks into an impassioned address to his protagonists in a manner strongly reminiscent of Lucan, passionately debating whether to tell or to conceal the truth of this deed, and reworking Lucan's own promise not to tell of the battle of Pharsalus.[164] Statius re-inscribes this moment into his own conclusion (*monstrumque infame futuris | excidat, et soli memorent haec proelia reges*, 11.578-9; *Fama benignum | stravit iter coepitque novam monstrare futuris... memoratque iuventus*, 12.812-15). Statius ends by recalling the moment where his narrative moved on after the death of his protagonists, a moment which seems like a strong rejection of Virgilian narrative patterns. The duel between Eteocles and Polynices echoes in detail several elements of the duel between Aeneas and Turnus,[165] but Statius avoids the ultimate homage to the *Aeneid* by *not* ending his poem with the death of brothers as Virgil did with the death of Turnus (and avoids *this* form of imitation a second time by continuing his poem after Theseus kills Creon). Statius recalls not the climactic duel of the *Aeneid* but rather Virgil's apostrophe to Nisus and Euryalus:

> fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,
> *nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo,*
> dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
> accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.

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[162] See Rutherford (1997) 48-50.
[163] See Malamud (1995) 192-3.
[164] Luc. *BC* 7.552-6.
[165] See Venini (1970) *ad loc*; Horsfall (1995) 282n.38.

(*Aen.* 9.446-9)

Statius reverses the movement of the Virgilian apostrophe in his own invocations of memory. Virgil guarantees immortality for Nisus and Euryalus whilst Rome remains intact. Statius implores his readership to remember his less fortunate pair, Eteocles and Polynices. Instead he moves forward with a Lucanian voice and he reminds us of the rejection of the Virgilian ending strategy in his own conclusion.

Yet Statius wants to move forward from the model that Lucan provides for him as well. Malamud suggests that Statius may also be working against the Lucanian model.[166] This seems to be a valuable way of reading both passages. Statius' poem, like Lucan's, also enacts the proposition that the poem repeats the crime it itself condemns, but Statius is insistent on the poem's potential to instigate a learning process. Learning is an important element in the conclusion of Statius' poem. The wish that kings remember the crime of the twins (*soli memorent haec proelia reges*, 11.579) is reiterated in the sphragis (*Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuventus*, 12.815). The emphasis on learning is mentioned below in *connection with Horace Epistles 1.20, but Statius also alludes to another, more confident* Horatian prediction of poetic immortality in *Odes* 2.20. Statius focuses his thoughts much more centrally on Rome. Where Horace boasted that the furthest flung tribes of the world would know his work (*noscent Geloni, me peritus | discet Hiber Rhodanique potor, Odes* 2.20.19-20), Statius only confirms that emperor and the youth of Rome will know his work (*dignatur noscere Caesar | ... discit memoratque iuventus, Theb.* 12.814-15). Statius' poem occupies a midpoint between the two Horatian texts, not on the outskirts of the city, but not throughout the empire either. The double allusion suggests a spatial self-positioning for *Statius' epic; he places his Thebaid in the heart of Rome. Yet the potentially didactic role* becomes more apparent through allusion to another text, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*.[167]

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[166] Malamud (1995) 193. Any discussion of Lucan at the end of the *Thebaid* is hampered by the fact that Lucan's poem was unfinished. Many of the points made here, especially about Lucretius and Horace, are neatly summarised in Henderson (1991) 38-9.

[167] A broadly didactic context might also be suggested by comparisons with the *Georgics*, of course.

Statius' image of his *Thebaid* following dutifully in the footsteps of the *Aeneid* is partly modelled on two passages by Lucretius, in both of which Lucretius portrays himself following in the footsteps of his master, Epicurus (*te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc | ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis, DRN* 3.3-4; *cuius ego ingressus vestigia dum rationes | persequor, DRN* 5.55-6).[168] Malamud emphasises the movement towards a didactic purpose in Statius' text: 'his conclusion is modelled on Ovid's transformation, and the role he see for his own transformed text is a didactic one: like Horace and Lucretius, *Thebais* will teach the young.'[169]

However, Malamud's article ends on this point. We have not pinpointed what is being taught (11.579, *proelia* could just be a shorthand for the poem as a whole, an equivalent to *acies* perhaps). Nor do we know to whom exactly this poem is addressed (who is included in the *iuventus*? Who are the *reges*? Is Domitian included in this?). Nor do we know what kind of knowledge Statius is attempting to transmit. As we shall see, the allusion to Horace *Epistles* suggests rote learning and schoolboy knowledge, while the allusion to Lucretius suggests philosophical knowledge. Further exploration of the relationship with Lucretius may yield greater understanding. Statius models the relationship between his own poem and the *Aeneid* upon the relationship between Lucretius and Epicurus. This model conforms to our understanding of *Thebais* as both subservient to and independent of the *Aeneid*. Lucretius was himself a dutiful follower of Epicurus, but also saw himself as an innovator, a philosophical and poetic master in his own right. We might add to the Lucretian model of didacticism the image of the path of learning. The idea of poetry being original or otherwise portrayed as the following of a broad or narrow path is a commonplace of ancient literature,[170] but we can also read these allusions to Lucretius following in Epicurus'

[168] See Malamud (1995) 194-5. For initiatory imagery in the proem to book 3 of the *DRN* and elsewhere, see Gale (1994) 193-5; Fowler (2000).
[169] Malamud (1995) 195.
[170] Behind all the Roman re-treadings of broad and narrow paths is Apollo's warning to Callimachus at *Aetia* 1.23-30, itself a re-write of Pindar *Pyth.* 4.247 and *Pae.* 7b.11-14. See Thomas (1998) 108-10.

footsteps as a parallel to the path that Fame is showing to *Thebais* (*fama benignum | stravit iter*, 12.812-13) which in turn is suggestive of the Epicurean path to wisdom.[171]

Lucretius throughout his poem casts an image of his poem as: 'a journey towards the truth which he is making in company with his pupil, following a route established by Epicurus himself.'[172] This image of the path to wisdom is a pervasive one in Lucretius' poetry,[173] and one that is often couched in the same language as we find in Statius' sphragis (cf. *vestigia notitiai*, *DRN* 2.124; compare *viam monstravit*, *DRN* 6.27 with *stravit iter*, 12.813) and which finds a close parallel in the conclusion of Lucretius' first book (*nec tibi caeca | nox iter eripiet*, *DRN* 1.1115-6). The Lucretian allusion becomes double-edged. The *Thebaid* follows in the *Aeneid*'s footsteps not only in the manner in which Lucretius followed Epicurus (i.e. confidently and independently, if reverentially), but also as the reader of the *DRN* follows Lucretius. The journey of learning that Lucretius' pupil must take is that of reading the entire poem itself. Logically, Lucretius' work cannot stage the end of that journey as being within the poem, the end is outside, beyond the confines of the text. Likewise, Statius looks beyond the end of his poem. The logical conclusion of his work exists outside the confines of the poem, the learning process must take place beyond the lesson it teaches. The sphragis stages the endlessness of the poem, but also confirms a didactic purpose for Statius' work.[174] Within the framework of Statius' epic, there is no learning, hence the poet's pained exclamation as Creon ascends to the throne (*numquamne priorum | haerebunt documenta novis?* 11.656-7) but this learning process is external to the text of the epic itself.[175]

Statius also exploits similarities between his sphragis and the final poem in Horace's *Epistles*, 1.20, in connection with the theme of learning. Horace's letter is, like the sphragis,

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[171] Especially *nec tibi caeca | nox iter eripiet*, 1.1115-6. Cf. also *DRN* 1.81-2, *impia te rationis inire elementa viamque | indugredi sceleris* and 1.402-3, *satis haec vestigia parva sagaci | sunt per quae possis cognoscere cetera tute*.
[172] Gale (2004a) 56.
[173] See *DRN* 1.72-4, 1.80-2, 2.123-4, 2.867-9, 5.55-6, 5.102-3, 6.27-8.
[174] Lovatt (2005) 23-32 analyses Statius' literary self positioning through imagery of chariot racing and sees (25) the image of *Thebaid* pursuing *Aeneid* (*Theb.* 12.816-17) in terms of a chariot race.
[175] *Pace* Markus (2003) 461 who sees Statius' wish for learning as 'an unrealistic wish' and 'a hypothetical situation.'

addressed to his own poetic work (*Epistle* 1.20.1), both poems are personified in ways that make them seem weak (Horace's book as pleasure-obsessed slave boy, Statius' epic as female *Thebais* in contrast to manly and divine *Aeneid*)[176] and both poems share a didactic concept, that they will teach the youth of Rome (*hoc quoque te manet, ut pueros in elementa docentem, Epist.* 1.20.17, cf. *discit iuventus*, 12.815). However, the didactic knowledge that Horace's epistle implies is very different from the philosophical learning of Lucretius, as Mayer makes clear: 'Horace's epistles will not have the grand moral function of Homer, rather they will be used as a cheap text for the first reading lessons (*elementa*) of poor children.'[177] Horace in *Epistles* 1.20 has a less stridently optimistic prediction for his poem's future than he does in the final poems of books 2 and 3 of his *Odes*, one which emphasises the damaging effects of passing time and the marginalisation of his poetry (*occupet extremis in vicis balba senectus, Epist.* 1.20.18).[178] Statius' sphragis opens with a less than confident assertion of his own poem's immortality (*durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes?*, 12.810) which is only partially amended in the final nine lines. Statius constructs striking parallels between his *Thebais* and Horace's *Epistles* through self-addressing conclusions,[179] sense of didactic purpose and uncertain sense of the future. We should emphasise how far both endings look back at the poetic project which they complete. Both projects involve *recusationes* at their core, the *Thebaid* a refusal to write the right kind of historical epic about Domitian (1.17-33), the *Epistles* a refusal to Maecenas to write another lyric project in the manner of *Odes* 1-3. Indeed, the *Epistles* has been interpreted as: 'the longest and most involved [*recusatio*] that the poet ever addressed to Maecenas.'[180] More recently, Freudenburg has read the *Epistles* as a poetic book that strives to assert the poet's independence and as a project that distinguishes at a programmatic level between 'erotic' and 'civil' lyric poetry and rejects the latter:

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[176] See Henderson (1991) 38-9.
[177] Mayer (1994) ad Hor. *Epist.* 20.17-18. On the *Thebaid*'s pretensions to becoming an educational text, see Keith (2000) 8-12.
[178] See Oliensis (1998) 177-9.
[179] Indeed Moles (2002) 144 describes 1.20.19-28 as: 'the *sphragis* of the last poem, Horace's farewell to his book.' For more on Horatian ending strategies in *Odes* book 1, see Griffiths (2002).
[180] Traina (1991) 301.

'the poet actively demonstrates his *autarkeia* ('self-reliance') that he so desperately seeks through these poems...every letter in the poem persists in saying 'no' to Maecenas...Maecenas is not asking for a return to lyric *per se*, but to the grand and engaged songs of the public fighter and benefactor; to epinician and songs of war.'[181]

Statius' willingness to link his poem not to the *Odes*, but to the *Epistles* has powerful implications.[182] Just as Horace distinguished between different kinds of lyric and settled on a form of lyric that excluded political statement, so Statius rejects historical epic in favour of a mythological project far removed from contemporary Rome. Statius models his relationship with Domitian on Horace's relationship with Maecenas. Moreover, the picture of following in the footsteps of the *Aeneid* also evokes an image from Horace *Epistles*:

> libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps,
> *non aliena meo pressi pede. qui sibi fidet*
> dux reget examen.
>
> (Hor. *Epist.* 1.19.21-3)

Horace performs his own re-working of the Lucretian image of following in the footsteps of Epicurus (*DRN* 3.3-4). Horace casts himself as *princeps* and *rex* and in what follows (1.20.23-9) casts himself as *triumphator* (as he was at *Odes* 3.30), arguing that his following of the metrical forms and conventions of Archilochus does not make him a slavish imitator and that, like the general in a triumph, he drives the procession in front of him.

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[181] Freudenburg (2002) 126-7. He argues against Traina (1991) that Horace abandons 'civil' in favour of 'erotic' lyric.

[182] Allusion to the language of Horace in the main body of the *Thebaid* is unusual, e.g. Smolenaars (1994) notes only 9 allusions to Horace in book 7.

Horace leads by following, hence the paradoxical allusion to Lucretius' following in the *footsteps of Epicurus in Horace's own assertion that he follows in no one's footsteps.* Freedom, says Horace, is not absolute: 'Perfect self-reliance, it seems, is the stuff of philosophical speculation, a pipe-dream kept alive by those who never penned a line of poetry in tradition-obsessed Latin.'[183] Some initial comparisons with Statius' sphragis are obvious: the poet asserts his relative independence in the face of the poetic tradition; Statius, *like Horace, distinguishes between formal and content-based affiliation to his models in his* prologue.

Furthermore, some of the Horatian triumphal imagery has filtered through to Statius' sphragis as well. *Thebais* follows her own triumphal procession, with *Fama* in the role of the senate, leading the way and preparing the ground, gaining the admiration of Caesar and Italian youth and winning the spoils earned in the battles she depicts.[184] Lovatt has recently demonstrated that Statius portrays poetic production in terms of athletic contexts (his father's successes, *Silvae* 5.3.138-40) and chariot races (*Silvae* 4.7.1-4, 21-8 on *Silvae* and *Achilleid*).[185] Furthermore, she suggests that: *'it is tempting to read the temptat* of line 27 [of 4.7] as a suggestion that the *Thebaid* is pursuing the *Aeneid* in a chariot race, especially given the idea of pursuit in the sphragis to the *Thebaid* (12.816-17).'[186] I would suggest that chariot and triumphal imagery are closely interlinked. We can easily transform the chariot race into a triumphal procession where *Thebais* rides on chariot as *triumphator*, following behind the captive *Aeneid.* At an interpretive stretch, we could even recall the allegedly traditional whisper of the slave in the *triumphator*'s ear, *respice post te, hominem te memento*, as something that Statius alludes to in the sphragis (*memoratque iuventus... nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta... meriti post me referentur honores, 12.815, 16, 19*).[187] Statius' poem could scarcely assert its authority more aggressively. Yet even such an image as the

[183] Freudenberg (2002) 135; see pp. 135-6 on this passage.
[184] See Versnel (1970); Scullard (1981) 213-17. Cf. Weinstock (1971) 60-79.
[185] Lovatt (2005) 23-5.
[186] Lovatt (2005) 25.
[187] The problem of course is that this generally oft-cited quote is best attested in a passage of Christian polemic by Tertullian *Apol.* 33.4, who is criticising the divinity of the Roman emperor, and has little support elsewhere. See Beard (2003b) 26 and n.22.

triumph admits of uncertainty. We only have to remember the famous Roman triumphs where captives upstaged their captors.[188]

The promise of well-earned honours (*meriti honores*, 12.819) is the language of worship paid to a hero or a god.[189] *Thebais* rivals divine *Aeneid*. The interaction with Horace's *Epistles* adds to the complexity of the picture that Statius creates. He follows the Augustan poet's subtle depiction of poetic independence, at once self-effacing and hugely self-confident, acknowledging the power of poetic tradition and imperial authority but refusing to give up his prerogative to produce original work within the confines of Latin literature and contemporary politics.

The double allusion to Horace and Lucretius emphasises what these two very different texts have in common, and thus the intentional thrust of Statius' own poem. All three texts portray themselves as providers of knowledge. Lucretius gives life-changing philosophical knowledge, Horace provides the *elementa* for the youth of Rome. Both authors assert their independence from a variety of authorities, literary, intellectual and political. Statius' allusion to these texts constructs his own poem's knowledge base and its independence. The poem's knowledge encompasses serious, even philosophical knowledge, a lesson for kings. It also entails basic, elementary knowledge, a lesson for the youth of Rome. As such it emulates its own master-text, the *Aeneid*, a poem which provides nothing less than an aetiological account of the geo-politics of the Mediterranean world, but also existed as a standard, basic educational text throughout the western empire.[190] Statius, in a pattern that is becoming familiar by now, asserts his poetic independence from the *Aeneid*. But he also asserts, in a more daring move, his own poem's power to provide knowledge to its audience. Statius attempts to force his poem into an educational system that uses epic poetry as its repository of *exempla*, as Keith describes:

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[188] E.g. Arsinoë at Julius Caesar's triumph, Dio Cassius 43.19-20; Appian *BC* 2.101-2; Suetonius *Iul.* 37; Perseus at Aemilius Paullus' triumph, Plutarch *Aem.* 34.1-2.
[189] Hardie (1993) 111. Cf. Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.*
[190] On Roman education, see Marrou (1956); Kaster (1988); Harris (1989); Woolf (2000) 119-21. For provincial readers of Rome, see Woolf (2003) 218-21; cf. Guillory (1993) 60-3. For evidence of Virgilian graffiti, see Hoogma (1959).

> 'ancient Roman educators undertook to school their (mostly male) pupils in Roman conventions of manliness. The ancient Roman grammarian accomplished this goal through linguistic instruction imparted in the form of the exposition of heroic narrative – Ennius' *Annales*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, even, perhaps, Statius' *Thebaid*...In the schools of both the grammarian and the rhetorician, epic poetry was interpreted primarily as the repository of culturally valued *exempla*, mastery of which set one on the path to the highest social and political positions.'[191]

Statius moves his poem into the heart of Rome and attempts to make his poem an essential element of the city's 'cultural capital'.[192] This move corresponds to the series of challenges that we noted in our initial examination of Statius' motives in writing the *Thebaid*. Statius' literary *auctoritas* supplants that of the emperor. Statius decides what the subject of his poem will be and challenges Domitian's expectations directly in creating a non-Roman, mythological epic that will provide knowledge of a surprising kind for the emperor. But Statius also ensures that the *Thebaid* obviates Domitian's control over readership by creating a popular epic that will mimic (Horace's *Epistles* and) the *Aeneid*, by becoming a schoolboy's text. All the youth of Rome will read the *Thebaid*, and thus Domitian's personal lesson from the epic poet will be one that is read throughout Rome, not just the imperial palace.

The image of following in the footsteps of the *Aeneid* (12.816-17) is also an allusion to the *Aeneid* itself.[193] Statius' instruction to his poem to follow not too closely behind the

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[191] Keith (2000) 11.

[192] For the term in educational sociology, see Bourdieu (1977) 183-8; (1990) 124-5. For the concept in relation to the literary canon, see Guillory (1993) 3-82. For its employment with reference to Roman epic, see Keith (2000) 8-35.

[193] Interestingly, the only strong allusions to the *Aeneid* in the sphragis are this and the mention of the poem by name, see Pollmann (2004) *ad loc*. Much as in the prologue, the sphragis is marked by a distinct lack of intertextual allusion to the *Aeneid*. Virgil's poem acts almost as though it were an 'absent presence'.

Aeneid parallels Aeneas' own instruction to his wife in Book 2 of the poem (*et longe servet vestigia coniunx, Aen. 2.711*). What is perhaps the most explicit intertextual reference in Latin literature encourages us to construe the apprentice-text and master-text as husband and wife.[194] The construction of the poem as a female *Thebais* only further encourages this perception. Behind the echo of Creusa lies another Virgilian wife, Eurydice.[195] Like Creusa, Eurydice will follow behind her husband (*pone sequens, Geo.* 4.487) and will, like Creusa, be destroyed as a result of her husband's carelessness. Creusa and Eurydice are particularly unsettling models, especially with regard to Statius' own sense of his poem's immortality. Creusa will soon disappear in the wreckage of Troy and the foundation of the Roman race. Eurydice literally disappears back into the Underworld, the victim of husband and Virgil's proto-farmer, Aristaeus. The images of Creusa and Eurydice sit uneasily with the confident expectations of the final lines (818-19). The sphragis summarises the paradox at the heart of the poem's own self-positioning: 'Statius is deliberately representing his own text as marginalised, as if it were a female voice in an earlier epic or woven into a tapestry, marginalised by the culture and Flavian power. But this self-marginalisation is paradoxical if not ironic. Like the women in the text, the *Thebaid* aspires to centrality and effect.'[196] Statius' exhortation to his poem to live (*vive*, 12.816) makes explicit his desire for his poem to overcome the fates of both Eurydice and Creusa.

Significantly, the final lines balance the echoes of Creusa and Eurydice with another epic heroine, Ovid's Arachne. Statius' mention of *Livor* (12.818) following his exhortation to his poem to live makes an intertextual link to the tale of Arachne as told by Ovid in book 6 of the *Metamorphoses* (*non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor | possit opus... Pallas*

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[194] Nugent (1996) 70-1. It is worth comparing this literary relationship to Livy 30.45.5 *hunc regem in triumpho ductum Polybius, haudquaquam spernendus auctor*, Livy's only explicit reference to the source that many believe to be the foundation for books 21-30. The quote from Livy illustrates by comparison the inferiority that Statius claims for himself and his poem. Such 'acquiescence in inferiority' is exceptional in ancient literature, see Russell (1979). Such an overt reference to a principal source may also key into the *Thebaid*'s historiographical colouring. It is worth noting that the extent of Polybius' influence on Livy 30 is still a matter of hot scholarly dispute, see e.g. Walsh (1961) 103; Tränkle (1977) 241; Leidig (1993) 80-9.

[195] On the *Thebaid*'s Orphic ending, see Pagán (2000) 439-46.

[196] Dietrich (1999) 50.

miserata levavit | atque ita: "vive quidem", *Met.* 6.129-36).[197] Such a move constructs a distinctly antagonistic relationship between *Thebais* and her divine rival, one where *Aeneid* will crush its rival but also one where *Thebaid* is implicitly superior. The activation of Arachne as a poetic model also replays the rejection of *Aeneid* as a model, aligning the *Thebaid*, like Arachne's weaving, with Ovidian poetic production in opposition to the epic master-text. Statius again emphasises the double-sided nature of his poetic relationship with the *Aeneid* but now presents it in a destructive light. Eurydice, Creusa and Arachne will all perish.

Arachne was also an important model in Domitianic ideology. The myth of Arachne is depicted on the surviving portion of the frieze of the temple of Minerva in Domitian's Forum Transitorium. The use of such a 'private' myth, one that revolves around women working wool, is unusual in Roman public art, and Arachne is not seen elsewhere in such contexts.[198] Yet as Fredrick notes: 'as a myth that illustrates Minerva's divine authority exacting punishment for human impiety, the subject matter seems entirely appropriate for a forum dominated by Minerva's temple, and perhaps used for law courts.'[199] The theme of Arachne also fits nicely with Domitian's revival in 89-90 AD of the *lex Julia*, incorporating control of the behaviour of women and Domitian's wider desire for moral reform. Yet the myth also evokes Ovid's treatment where Minerva's tapestry can be read as a representation of Augustan classicism in public art and architecture and Arachne's tapestry of divine rapes can be read as a representation of 'Ovid's own open-ended, non-classical treatment of narrative structure in the *Metamorphoses*.'[200] The myth in Ovid's hands also represents a challenge to Augustan ideology. This apparent conflict suits Domitianic ideology well, combining a programme of authority and control with a challenge to Augustanism.[201] Statius

[197] 12.816, *vive*, also links the sphragis more concretely to the end of the *Metamorphoses* by echoing its final word, *vivam*, *Met.* 15.879. Cf. also Ovid *Tristia* 1.1.19-20. See Dietrich (1999) 50 and Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.*
[198] See D'Ambra (1993) 12; Fredrick (2003) 223-7.
[199] Fredrick (2003) 223, 226. Cf. D'Ambra (1993) 47-59.
[200] Fredrick (2003) 226.
[201] For other architectural challenges to Augustus by Domitian, see chapter 2.

slots his own Domitianic epic into this pattern, at once identifying itself with authority and *simultaneously breaking away from the traditions of Augustan literature.*

The invocation of *Livor* directs us towards another Ovidian intertext, *Amores* 1.15, a poem that Ovid directs at *Livor edax*, gnawing Envy (1.15.1).[202] This has been lurking in the background as another reflection on the immortality of an author's verse. The sphragis in Statius' poem is strongly reminiscent of the end of Ovid's poem:

> pascitur in vivis livor; post fata quiescit,
> cum suus ex merito quemque tuetur honos.
> ergo etiam cum me supremus adederit ignis,
> vivam, parsque mei multa superstes erit.
>
> (Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.39-42)

Statius invokes similar concepts in his sphragis, anticipates the death of any envy that might come forward (*Livor | occidet*, 12.818-9) and honours for his poem after his own death (*meriti post me referuntur honores*, 12.819), but with less confidence. Statius is unsure of whether his poem will survive (*superstes?*, 12.810) and rather than confidently asserting his own life after death, implores his own poem to live. Yet while the malicious criticism *that Ovid suffers is a small price to pay for literary immortality, Statius shifts his attention* away from himself and onto his poem, questioning its very survival.

The fundamental ambiguity is underlined by the verb *occidet* (12.819). The most natural way to read this verb is with *Livor* as its subject, but Statius leaves open the possibility that the verb could have another subject. Likely subject (*Livor*) and verb (*occidet*) are separated by line division and by placing the former in the protasis and the latter in the apodosis of the conditional statement. Following his exhortation not to follow *Aeneid* too closely, and followed by the promise of *meriti... honores*, we might even see Statius

[202] Williams (2002) 418-24 examines the influence of Ovid's characterisation of Envy in relation to Martial 10.2, the latter text being written shortly after Domitian's death.

anticipating the death of the *Aeneid*. Yet following the images of Eurydice, Creusa and Arachne, it seems that Statius also anticipates his poem's destruction by its husband/master. These *honores* might also be burial tokens. The antagonistic relationship between husband and wife, mortal and divine might result in one poem being tested to destruction.

Such a gloomy set of interpretations makes for a very different reading of *vive* (12.816) than one might expect from reading another of its intertexts, Lucan's own promise to Caesar of his own poem's immortality (9.980-6, esp. *venturi me teque legent; Pharsalia nostra | vivet*, 9.985-6).[203] The context of Lucan's passage is arresting. Lucan interrupts his account of Caesar's visit to Troy. Statius surely intends us to recall Lucan's anti-hero trampling over the ruins of Troy from a metapoetical point of view.[204] This is the geographical starting point of the *Aeneid*, which Lucan portrays reduced to *vestigia* (*BC* 9.965). The poet gives his poem an injunction not to crush *Aeneid* underfoot like Caesar walking on the tombs and altars of Troy. The *Thebaid* must avoid Lucanian impropriety, but in a beautiful paradox, this becomes equated with walking too closely in *Aeneid*'s *vestigia*.

6. "Vive, precor" and love letters.

However, the disquieting imagery that suffuses Statius' sphragis becomes more strongly marked when one reads *vive* with *precor*. This is no confident assertion of long life, rather a fervent prayer by Statius that his poem will survive at all. Thus, although some exceptions are possible, the phrase clearly evokes a sense that the person or object to whom the phrase is addressed is about to die. *Vive precor* is particularly suggestive of two Ovidian heroines from the *Heroides*.[205] Allusion at such a key moment to two elegiac verse epistles from mythological heroines, poems dominated by themes of separation and loss, is a bold intertextual move, even by Statius' standards. Yet there are obvious attractions to such a move. Statius' dramatisation of his newly completed poem as an abandoned woman

[203] On *BC* 9.980-6, see Leigh (1997) 18, 53, 80, 102-3; Radicke (2004) 65.
[204] See Bartsch (1997) 131-5.
[205] Cf. also Ovid *Fasti* 5.412 and Appendix.

heightens the verbal allusions to Creusa and Eurydice. It also marks out Statius' anxiety in abandoning his poem to fate. However, Statius' interest in Ovid's *Heroides* is sparked by another quality of the letters, their allusiveness. Ovid's letters are all re-runs of other stories, tales that have been told before, often many times and in many famous texts. As such, the *Heroides* cannibalise the texts that they invoke, consuming the material of earlier texts and regurgitating them in novel form. The parasitic, intertextual nature of the *Heroides* is an attribute that understandably struck a chord with the belated Flavian epicist. Both Ovid's *Heroides* and Statius' *Thebaid* share a similar 'anxiety of influence'. Tellingly, Statius alludes in the sphragis to two letters based on epic tales: Oenone's letter to Paris in the build-up to the Trojan War, and Dido's letter to Aeneas before her suicide. Statius' relationship with Ovid is a complex one. It demonstrates the nature of his poem's relationship with its epic predecessor, the *Aeneid*. Moreover, Statius portrays himself as a reader of the *Aeneid* in the manner of Ovid. As we shall see, his poem both distances itself from and parasitizes Virgil's epic.

In Oenone's letter to Paris (*Heroides* 5), the nymph recalls how she used to go hunting with him and how he would carve her name upon the trunks of the beech trees using his knife (5.19-24). Oenone believes that her fame will increase as the trees grow because the inscriptions of her name will grow as well (5.25) and exhorts the trees to grow straight in order that her name will be remembered (*titulos*, 5.26).[206] She urges a particular poplar tree growing by a stream to grow tall to ensure her fame (*populе, vive, precor, quae consita margine ripae | hoc in rugoso cortice carmen habes*, 5.27-8) before recalling the couplet Paris carved into its trunk (5.29-30).

In Oenone's letter, the couplet and Oenone's name carved onto the tree trunks are the only definitive piece of writing by a man in the single *Heroides*.[207] Ovid actualises the act of writing, Oenone's name is something to be read (*legor Oenone falce notata tua*, 5.22,

[206] Inscribing the name of a loved one on a tree is a motif of Hellenistic and Augustan poetry. Cf. Callimachus *Aetia* 3 fr. 73 Pf.; Virgil *Eclogues* 5.13-14, 10.53-4; Propertius 1.18.22; Cal. Sic. *Ecl.* 1.20-5. See Ross (1975) 72-4; Knox (1995) *ad loc.*
[207] Farrell (1998) 327-8.

note the juxtaposition of names in the inscription *PARIS OENONE*, 5.29) and the couplet is not presented as an inscription but as song (*carmen*, 5.28).[208] The writing on the trees, the name Oenone, the letter itself are blurred into one seamless written act, an irony that Oenone exploits from the first word of her letter (*Perlegis?* 5.1). The beech trees are more disturbing, presented in Oenone's letter as monuments with commemorative inscriptions (*titulos*, 5.26) that may suggest the appearance of funeral monuments.[209] Paris' *adynaton* unwittingly anticipates the Trojan War, the seeds of which he has already sown, and the blocking of the Xanthus in *Iliad* 21. Oenone's wish is effectively to avoid epic. Were her desire to reunite with Paris fulfilled, Oenone would remove any impetus for the Trojan War. Her letter, and if we follow Holzberg's persuasive analysis of the *Heroides*, the first book of the *Heroides*, ends with a prayer (*precor*, 5.158, is the final word) that presents the desire to reunite in terms of opposition between erotic elegy and epic poetry (*dignae miserere puellae! | non ego cum Danais arma cruenta fero*, 5.155-6).[210] Oenone's letter stages the typically Ovidian opposition between elegy's *puella* and epic's *arma cruenta*. Statius' allusion to this passage is stimulating, given the shared interest in the future survival of a work of literature and the relationship between literature and fame within the context of a male-female relationship. Statius maps the Ovidian opposition onto his own poem's (staged as erotic, husband-and-wife) relationship with Virgilian master-text. Statius' allusion to Ovid's/Oenone's letter casts Thebais as an elegiac *puella* suffering from her affiliation to the masculine, epic *Aeneid*. It also stages the poem's affiliation and separation from the *Aeneid qua* epic poem. Ovid's letter from Oenone helps to distinguish the genres of elegy and epic. Statius' intertextual allusion helps us to understand the deep-seated distinctions within one genre, between Statian and Virgilian epic. In a sense, Statius' staging of his poem's relationship with the *Aeneid* is even more self-conscious than the *Heroides*. The opposition is staged and deconstructed at the same moment. The poet knows his poem is really an epic

[208] For similar use of *carmen* in the *Heroides*, see 2.146, 7.194.
[209] *OLD* s.v. *titulus* 2b, commemorative inscriptions; cf. *OLD* s.v. *titulus* 7a-b, honours.
[210] See Holzberg (2002).

and as such will partake of the Virgilian epic's world, no matter how much it attempts to follow other paths.

Yet this connection between Oenone and *Thebais* is supported by another allusion to another elegiac letter, *Heroides* 7, Dido's letter to Aeneas. In a recent article, Miller has described the unusual intertextual relationship that Dido's letter has with its own master-text, *Aeneid* 4.[211] *Heroides* 7 is especially unusual in that its subject precludes significant allusion to any other text than the *Aeneid.* Miller explores that parasitic nature of the Ovidian text, identifying the interpretive gap between reading the letter as the product of the coherent character who is the Carthaginian queen, desperately attempting to recover her doomed relationship with her lover, and the knowing, near-parodic, intertextual re-writing of Virgil's *Aeneid*: 'it is impossible to appreciate the poem as the mimetic rendering of a unified subject responsible for her own speech.'[212] *Heroides* 7 is instead presented as a dialogic interaction with Virgil's text: '[Ovid] uses the *Aeneid* to create a concentration and density of signifying effects that both elevates his own poem as an object of discourse and threatens its very coherence. The result is a complex multi-voiced work that at once acknowledges its dependence on Virgil, asserts its own unique nature, and ultimately undermines the dramatic conceit on which *Heroides* 7 is based.'[213] Such an intertextual relationship as *Heroides* 7 has with the *Aeneid* is extremely similar to the one identified between *Thebaid* and *Aeneid* in the sphragis. Yet re-reading the *Thebaid* with an eye on the Ovidian letter reveals that *Heroides* 7 is an even more important text for Statius than we had previously acknowledged. As well as alluding to Dido's exclamation at the conclusion of the *Thebaid*, Statius makes multiple allusions to Ovid's poem in the programmatic opening of his poem.

Statius' opening invocation of the Muses (*unde iubetis | ire, deae... canam, Theb.* 1.3-4) mimics the opening couplet of *Heroides* 7 with its image of the dying swan singing at the command of Fate (*sic ubi fata vocant... | concinit albus olor, H.* 7.1-2) and Aeneas' own reported reason for abandoning Dido (*sed iubet ire deus, H.* 7.139). Statius' own invocation

[211] Miller (2004) esp. 57-61. Cf. also Desmond (1993).
[212] Miller (2004) 59.
[213] Miller (2004) 61.

of the Muses is carefully phrased, leaving the identity of the goddesses unspecified, and presenting their inspiration of him in terms of divine command and movement. After the opening section of her poem, Dido then shifts into a series of rhetorical questions:

> certus es, Aenea, cum foedere solvere naves,
> quaeque ubi sint nescis, Itala regna sequi?
> nec nova Carthago, nec te surgentia tangunt
> moenia nec sceptro tradita summa tuo?
> facta fugis, facienda petis; quaerenda per orbem
> *altera. quaesita est altera terra tibi.*
>
> (*Heroides* 7.9-14)[214]

Aeneas will sail away, complains Dido, in search of unknown Italian kingdoms (7.10). Aeneas rejects the opportunity to grasp supreme power symbolised by the sceptre (7.12),[215] Aeneas flees from deeds already accomplished and pursues deeds yet to be done instead (7.13). Dido portrays Aeneas as a feckless wanderer, destined to run away from responsibility again (*altera... altera*, 7.14) and ruin the lives of yet more women (*scilicet alter amor tibi restat et altera Dido, | quamque iterum fallas, altera danda fides*, 7.17-18). The language of repetition pervades Dido's hyper-emotional misreading of Virgil's Aeneas, the language of repetition acting as a metapoetic signal of Ovid and Dido's re-writing of the *Aeneid*. Yet Dido's reading of Aeneas as a serial monogamist and abandoner of women is not without precedent; Dido cites as evidence his abandonment of Creusa in Troy (7.79-85),[216] the moment that provided such an arresting model for the *Thebaid*'s status as another *Aeneid*.

It is not only the closing sphragis that invokes *Heroides* 7 as a crucial model, the prologue of the poem shares similar concerns with Dido's letter and tackles its own choice

[214] On these lines see also Knox (1995) *ad loc.*; Miller (2004) 62-3.
[215] Cf. chapter 5.
[216] Desmond (1993) 61.

of themes in similar terms. Statius uses Dido's language of alternation and rejection in the analysis and exhibition of his own poetic choices. Statius avoids, for the moment at any rate, the opportunity to narrate his own Italian standards (*Itala nondum | signa*, *Theb.* 1.17-18; cf. *H.* 7.10),[217] Statius will grasp the sceptre, a potent symbol within the *Thebaid* of the corrupting influence of power upon tyrants (*geminis sceptrum exitiale tyrannis*, *Theb.* 1.34; cf. *H.* 7.12, *sceptraque sacra tene*, 7.152), a symbol of power which Aeneas, in Dido's depiction, rejected in favour of further epic wanderings. Where Dido anticipates repetition of Aeneas' deeds (another kingdom, another love, another broken promise), Statius' narrative is programmatically predicated upon a different kind of alternation, alternate reigns and alternate slaughter (*alternaque regna*, 1.1; *alternis mortibus*, 1.37) and lacks the inspiration required to sing of Italian, Domitianic deeds (*cum Pierio tua fortior oestro | facta canam*, *Theb.* 1.32-3). Statius' impetus to write poetry is presented with the same inflammatory imagery that characterises all lovers, but especially Dido in her passion for Aeneas (*Pierius menti calor incidit*, *Theb.* 1.3; *uror ut inducto ceratae sulpure taedae, | ut pia fumosis addita tura focis*, *H.* 7.23-4).[218] Vessey's analysis of *calor* in the *Thebaid* is instructive: 'the noun covers "desire" or "love" as much as it does the "fire" of poetic frenzy.'[219] Dido presents Aeneas with the possibility of all he desires from Italy, wars, conquest and law-giving, as things available in Troy (7.151-62).[220] Statius is presented with a similar choice between Domitianic conquests (*Theb.* 1.17-22), but rejects these in favour of Theban battles. Where Dido depicts Aeneas sailing off into the sunset, Statius remains. What Aeneas pursues, Statius rejects. Thus Statius construes his poem as rejection of the Roman epic ethos to be

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[217] Note also how the Furies signal Dido's doom, *Eumenides fatis signa dedere mei*, *H.* 7.96. Cf. *dant signum*, *Aen.* 4.167, and see Knox (1995) *ad loc.*; Miller (2004) 63-7.

[218] *Uror* alludes to *Aen.* 4.68, *uritur infelix Dido*, although it is a ubiquitous metaphor in Ovid: see McKeown (1987-97) ad *Am.* 1.1.26; Knox (1995) *ad loc.*

[219] Vessey (1986) 2968. Cf. *OLD* s.v. *calor* 6, with *Theb.* 3.701; *Ach.* 1.888. *Calor* is also used as a pre-condition of writing in the *Silvae*, 1 *praef.* 3, 14 and it is used in Quintilian's discussion of *silvae* (*IO* 10.3.17). In both these latter passages the speed of composition and improvised performance is emphasised, see Nauta (2002) 252; Markus (2003) 438.

[220] Dido cites *fraternaque tela* (7.157), the weapons of his brother, Cupid (in other words, his love for Dido), as a reason for Aeneas to stay in Carthage. Such a tortuous allusion is not uncommon in Latin poetry but given that Aeneas leaves in order to found the Roman race, the phrase conjures imagery of fraternal conflict (Romulus and Remus in particular) and civil war that in turn acquire new resonance when Statius alludes to this poem at the beginning and end of his poem of *fraternas acies*.

identified in the figure of Aeneas. The *Thebaid* is implicitly a rejection of the values and objectives that a character such as Aeneas pursues. Moreover, Statius observes these values and objectives with a critical eye. He is reader of the *Aeneid* every bit as much as Ovid and Dido are.[221] Statius models his reading of the *Aeneid* on that of Dido in *Heroides* 7. His own poem mimics the fundamental oppositions that Ovid constructs between elegy and epic.

7. Seeking Domination.

The use of Dido's letter as intertext has important implications for the poetics of Statius' epic. We can see how Statius constructs his poem against the model of the *Aeneid*. Like Dido's letter, it cannot truly be independent of its master-text but it strives in opposition to it and ultimately seeks to over-write the original text of the *Aeneid* with its own epic re-writing. Yet this has important implications for Statius' other key authority figure, Domitian. The concluding sphragis opens with a question for the poem itself: *durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes?* (12.810). Given that the poet characterises his *Thebais* as product of twelve years labour (*o mihi bissenos multum vigilata per annos | Thebai*, 12.811-12),[222] it is natural to assume that the *dominus* in this case is Statius himself. Yet the lines that follow re-introduce the authority figures of the *Aeneid* and Domitian and thus suggest that *dominus* is a fundamentally ambiguous term.[223] Both *Aeneid* and Domitian are possible *domini* for the *Thebaid*. The notion that Statius' epic may view the *Aeneid* as a master-text and that it may exert a destructive superiority over that master is one that has been explored in detail. Yet we must explore the possible allusion to Domitian as *dominus* further.

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[221] Literary inheritance is mapped through readers within each text. Virgil's Dido reads Aeneas' account of the fall of Troy and his wanderings as narrated in *Aeneid* 2 and 3. Ovid's Dido also reads *Aeneid* 4. Statius' *Thebais* reads *Heroides* 7 and through that text the *Aeneid*.

[222] Modelled on Helvius Cinna fr.3, Morel. See Delarue (2000) 88.

[223] Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.* suggests that: 'one can suspect here a double entendre, as Domitian insisted on being called *dominus deus*.' I would suggest a triple entendre, implying Statius, Domitian and the *Aeneid* as possible *domini*, and that any reference to the emperor is more complex than she allows.

Pollmann in her commentary links this ambiguous term to the title by which Domitian was sometimes addressed, *dominus et deus*.[224] The allusion is plausible, especially given that Statius speaks of Domitian in quasi-divine terms in the prologue (1.24-30), but we should be cautious of ascribing this one interpretation given the emotive response that the title has evoked both in Trajanic and later ancient sources and also in modern scholarship. Instead, we should contemplate the implications of his literary self-positioning with regard to the *Aeneid* for his relationship with Domitian. The *Thebaid* constructs an astonishing relationship with the *Aeneid*, feigning submissiveness, even to the point of alluding to the poem's own annihilation, but also leaves open the possibility that *Thebaid* will exceed, outlive and re-write its most important model. The importance of *Thebaid*'s programmatic relationship with *Heroides* 7 indicates that Statius' epic enjoys a quasi-parasitic relationship with the *Aeneid*, relying on Virgil's poem for its own existence, but also feeding off it. For any reader, Statius constructs a difficult path where to read Statius is also to read Virgil and to re-write Virgil in the same moment. Statius also indicates that this is a learning process. As his one explicitly named reader (in the *Thebaid* itself), Domitian will learn from Statius' appropriation of the *Aeneid* and its redeployment towards his own ends.

The appropriation of the *Aeneid* by Statius has been read as a challenge to the Roman national poem at a cultural level.[225] The *Thebaid* is constructed as a rival to the *Aeneid* at both ends of the cultural and intellectual scale. It challenges the emperor's expectations, attempts to supplant the *Aeneid* at both a literary and educational level. This rivalry is all the more striking and all the more daring, when one reads the *Thebaid* as Woolf suggests: 'is it safe to read the *Thebaid* according to the conventions of *Roman* epic, when it is sung by a Greek on a Greek theme, inspired by Greek Muses, and played (1.33) on a *chelys*?...This anti-introduction keeps even the skilled reader guessing about what will

[224] For a complete list of the uses of these titles in literature (there are no epigraphic attestations) see, Scott (1936) 102-12. For other potential uses of *dominus et deus* in the *Thebaid*, see Dominik (1994) 158-61. Note how Statius at *Silvae* 1.6.83-4 states that Domitian *rejected* the title *dominus* (just as Augustus had done, Suet. *Aug.* 53.1): see also Newlands (2002) 248.
[225] Woolf (2003) 206-9.

follow, and about how the epic is to be read.'[226] The natural inferiority that poet and poem have in the face of their Roman tradition is turned as a weapon against that tradition. Statius' *Thebaid* threatens to re-write the conventions of Roman epic *tout court* and not just its greatest exemplar. Whilst I hope that this chapter has demonstrated that Statius uses some radical strategies in his composition and direction of the *Thebaid*, I would suggest that Woolf's analysis deliberately over-emphasises the cultural alienation that the *Thebaid* constructs. Greek Muses had been part of Roman epic since Ennius (and his patron, Fulvius Nobilior) introduced them to Rome. Statius was born from a Greek background but was also an Italian working in Rome and made the conscious choice of writing in Latin.[227] As the Romanised son of a Greek *grammaticus*, he resembles the founding fathers of Roman epic, Livius Andronicus, a Greek freedman from Tarentum, and Ennius, a Messapian immigrant, much more closely than the gentlemen poets of the Augustan age. Statius would, I suggest, have known that his poem would not have made such a powerful impact had it not partaken of and engaged with the conventions of Roman epic.

Therefore, Domitian and the *Aeneid* hold parallel positions in relation to the poem, and Statius constructs his own *auctoritas* by creating a poem that goes against the grain by refusing to imitate a historical, panegyrical epic such as the *Aeneid*. Such 'authority' rivals not only the *Aeneid* but also Domitian. In other words, Statius feigns submissiveness before the emperor but also raises the possibility that his poem will exceed and outlive its most important reader. Moreover, Domitian is to be educated by the content of Statius' poem, content which is portrayed as a re-writing of Virgil. Despite the mythological subject-matter of the poem, political and historical reality is never far away. It does not need to establish links between its own world and the present day as the *Aeneid* does. The *Thebaid* instead works within the Virgilian epic universe (albeit one transformed) where links to the

[226] Woolf (2003) 208, his emphasis.
[227] On Statius' Greek parentage, see Holford-Strevens (2002). Writing in Greek would have been a perfectly permissible strategy in a Rome where the emperor himself wrote in Greek: see Morgan (1997).

contemporary political landscape are already established. The kings and heroes of Statius' *Thebaid* will provide the emperor with his challenging learning experience.

CHAPTER 2

LOOKING AT VIRTUES: LEADERSHIP AND VIRTUS

1. Roman contexts.

i. Re-building Rome.

Statius' *Thebaid* was a risky enterprise. The radically innovative and politically challenging project might have elicited disaster or rich reward. Despite Statius' ultimate failure to win the Capitoline games (a fact often used to imply his ultimate failure to win approval from Domitian and invoked as a reason for the poet's hidden dislike of his emperor), *Silvae* 4.7 demonstrates that the *Thebaid* enjoyed a happy and triumphant reception and the poem anticipates the new epic project, the *Achilleid*. It should be suggested that the subject-matter of the *Achilleid* (mythological; re-appropriating the material of a great epic poet, this time Homer; heavily influenced by Ovidian elegy in the surviving portion of the text;[228] resolutely *not* historical panegyric of the emperor) encourages the belief that the *Thebaid* was well enough received for Statius to contemplate another similar epic project.

Statius' first epic both had a didactic purpose and intended to rewrite Virgil's *Aeneid*. We will, for the moment, focus on the latter point. Virgil's *Aeneid* was the greatest literary product of the Augustan age. It became the national poem and the text that was inculcated from an early age into all schoolboys across the empire. Statius' following in the tradition of the *Aeneid* constitutes an attempt to insert his Flavian epic into the place of the greatest literary monument of Augustan Rome. Such a move fitted neatly into the ethos of Domitian's reign. The emperor himself rebuilt, rededicated and rewrote many of Rome's greatest monuments, including many from the Augustan period. The Flavian dynasty, and Domitian in particular, worked to inscribe their own identity on the very fabric of Rome.[229] When Domitian came to power, he inherited a capital city that had suffered much in the

[228] For the *Achilleid*'s Ovidianisms, see Koster (1979); Fantham (1979); Rosati (1994) esp. 25-33; Barchiesi (1996); Hinds (1998) 135-44; (2000).
[229] See Darwall-Smith (1996).

previous two decades. Not all of the building work planned by Nero after the fire of 64 AD had been completed by 81 AD (*ILS* 4914), much damage had occurred during the civil war in 69 AD (e.g. Suet. *Vesp.* 15.3) and Vespasian and Titus both undertook many projects of which the Flavian amphitheatre is but the best known. Finally, in 80 AD, another fire destroyed a great deal of the city and many of Rome's famous monuments (Dio 66.24.1). Domitian undertook an enormous programme of restoration and public building. We may surmise that Domitian wanted to make Rome Domitianic: 'the major Flavian projects – the restoration of the Capitoline, the Flavian amphitheatre, the Baths of Titus, the Forum Transitorium, the restoration of Pompey's theatre – are enormous reminders that time and history did not stop with Augustus.'[230]

One example of this process is the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitol.[231] An older temple on the site had been damaged by a thunderbolt in 9 BC and was restored by Augustus, who boasted that he deliberately omitted to inscribe his own name on the restored temple (*Res Gestae* 20.1).[232] That temple was destroyed in the civil war of 69 AD (Tac. *Hist.* 3.72; Suet. *Vit.* 15.2; Dio 65.17.3). Vespasian rebuilt the temple (Suet. *Vesp.* 8.5) but it burned down again only four years after its completion in 80 AD (Dio 66.24.2). Although partially restored almost immediately, it was rededicated in Domitian's reign, and the emperor inscribed only his own name, omitting those of all previous builders (*omnia sub titulo suo ac sine ulla pristini auctoris memoria*, Suet. *Dom.* 5). The new temple was a magnificent structure, with a white pentelic marble façade (*Dom.* 5; Plut. *Publ.* 15.4), and, according to the ancient accounts, doors plated with gold and a roof covered with gilt tiles, the combined cost of which was estimated by Plutarch at 12000 talents.[233] It was at once 'reassuringly traditional' while it nonetheless 'expressed the wealth and taste of the late first century.'[234] Writers such as Suetonius saw the new temple as a classic example of

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[230] Fredrick (2003) 205.
[231] See Briessmann (1955) 69-75; Darwall-Smith (1996) 41-7.
[232] Ironically, this emphasised Augustus' personal patronage, especially given that he records it in the *Res Gestae*.
[233] See Plutarch *Publicola* 15.3-5; Zosimus 5.38.4; Procopius *Vand.* 3.5.
[234] Packer (2003) 174.

Domitian's *hubris*, but it undoubtedly made a powerful statement, not only through the unique richness of the temple, but also through Domitian's willingness to write both Catulus and Vespasian out of the record and to outdo Augustus by this act.[235] Moreover, Domitian's act of effacement contrasts with the ideology of the Augustan regime that sought to build links and create continuity with the Republican past; Domitian's regime looks to the future.[236]

Elsewhere, Domitian demonstrated his willingness to transform the visual memory of Augustus in his restoration of the temple of Divus Augustus.[237] The temple was completely rebuilt with a shrine to Domitian's patron goddess, Minerva (Martial 5.53.1-2), and as a memorial to four emperors, including Vespasian and Titus.[238] Again, Domitian demonstrated his desire to make Rome his own city, and in particular to transform many of the distinctively Augustan elements within Rome's topography. Domitian's temple restorations fit nicely into Fredrick's appreciation of Flavian buildings that 'typically overwhelm and erase.'[239] It is interesting, and perhaps surprising, that emperors continued to endeavour for immortality through architecture, since any successor could simply build over their own monuments, just as they superseded the monuments of their predecessors. The inherent fragility of these monuments is emphasised both by the Flavians' eagerness to build over Neronian architecture, especially the hated *Domus Aurea*, and Domitian's own *damnatio memoriae*.[240] Although both these events coincide with the end of ruling dynasties, succession itself does not assure permanence, as Domitian's development of his father's and brother's monuments shows. Architectural work thus requires the support of the literature

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[235] On Domitian's building programme, see Jones (1992) 79-98 and on re-buildings of the Capitoline, see Edwards (1996) 74-82. Domitian's magnificent restoration of the Capitol can also be seen as a reversal of Augustus' focus on other temples, see Zanker (1988) 108; Edwards (1996) 71. Criticism of Domitian's new temple is put in the mouth of Epicharmus by Plutarch, *Publ.* 15.5.

[236] On Augustus' desire to maintain and reinvigorate the Republican past, especially through *exempla*, see *RG* 8.5; Eder (1990); Gowing (2005) 18-19.

[237] The temple was built in the reign of Tiberius and destroyed by fire some time before 79 AD (Pliny *NH* 12.94).

[238] See Jones (1992) 91.

[239] Fredrick (2003) 206.

[240] On *damnatio*, see Flower (1998); Hedrick (2000) 89-94; Gowing (2005) 2.

that immortalises it (many of Domitian's monuments survived the *damnatio* only in literary records).

Statius encodes his own accounts of Domitianic monumentalism with these qualities of erasing, re-writing and improving the past.[241] Statius' account of Domitian's equestrian statue in the *forum Romanum* in *Silvae* 1.1 is a masterful act of re-writing Rome.[242] Statius instantly sets up the twin themes of extraordinary scale (*superimposito moles geminata colosso* 1.1.1)[243] and topographical location; paradoxically, the super-statue embraces the forum (*stat Latium complexa forum*, 1.1.2; *par operi sedes*, 1.1.22). The scale of the statue outdoes even the most famous giant horse (1.1.8-15), the Trojan Horse of Virgilian epic, described as being known throughout the ages and, tellingly, as possessing a prior fame (*fama prior notum per saecula*, 1.1.8). The Trojan Horse is itself paradoxical, destructive for Troy yet necessary for the Roman race. Statius contrasts the horse filled with savage Greeks with the gentle rider in the Forum (1.1.14-15). This new horse simply could never have entered Troy (*hunc neque discissis cepissent Pergama muris*, 1.1.11), its nature is different, and it belongs to a new age. Domitian's horse is fit to occupy the centre of the Roman world, and so is Domitian himself, the equal of the statue (*par forma decorque, | par honor*, 1.1.17-18).

Statius stages the equestrian statue's trumping of Rome's historical past (1.1.22-31).[244] Domitian exceeds Julius Caesar's *clementia* with his own gentler arms (*mitior armis*,

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[241] See Henderson (2003) 238-9; Gowing (2005) 105.

[242] Statues of mounted warriors were connected with the cult of *virtus*: see Tuck (2005) esp. 240-5.

[243] *Moles* is a potentially disconcerting word indicating magnitude and impending calamity or collapse. See *OLD* s.v. *moles* 7. The formula *moles belli* is used by Livy and Velleius Paterculus and Tacitus employs this phrase especially in connection with civil war. Cf. *Hist.* 1.61.2 *tota mole belli secuturus* with Damon (2003) *ad loc.*; 2.6.1 *tarda mole civilis belli*; 2.74.2 *in tanta mole belli plerumque cunctantio*. Statius himself regularly uses *moles* to indicate the size of buildings, cf. e.g. *Theb.* 6.242-3 *stat saxea moles, | templum ingens cineri*; *Silv.* 4.2.23 *tanta patet moles*; but also for more disastrous images, e.g. the destructiveness of Jupiter's thunderbolts, *Theb.* 3.320-3 *volat ignea moles | saeva dei mandata ferens, caelumque trisulca | territat omne coma iamdudum aut ditibus agris | signa dare aut ponto miseros involvere nautas*; and also in an unusual phrase indicating the deadly force of Capaneus' giant spear, *Theb.* 7.676 *librabat magna venturam mole cupressum*, 'with great momentum': see Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* On the metapoetic implications of massive size here, see Gibson (2006) 168-73.

[244] The suggestion that Statius' own family had lost equestrian status through impoverishment, based on *Silvae* 5.3.116-20 adds an interesting undercurrent to the equestrian theme. Most commentators are cagey on this point, cf. Hardie (1983) 6 and n.35; Coleman (1988) xv; Laguna (1992) 4; Nauta (2002)

1.1.25) and Statius even claims that Pompey and Cato would have bowed before Caesar's laws if Domitian had been holding Caesar's standards (*te signa ferente | et minor in leges gener et Cato Caesaris irent*, 1.1.27-8).[245] The civil war would, we must assume, have been avoided altogether and Rome would have slipped seamlessly into imperial rule, such is Domitian's power. Instead the location of the statue acts as a reminder of the location of Julius Caesar's assassination (an irony of course, as Domitian will himself be assassinated). Later a comparison between Domitian's statue and the equestrian statues of Julius Caesar in his forum (1.84-90, Caesar's statue, itself a statue of Alexander with a new head, prompting further comparisons) yields the predictable result: Domitian is far superior, the rider/rulers are worlds apart (*quis rudis usque adeo qui non, ut viderit ambos, | tantum dicat equos quantum distare regentes?* 1.1.89-90).

Domitian is backed by and can turn his back on both the Temple of Vespasian and Titus and that of Concordia Augusta (1.1.31). The former was one of Domitian's own buildings from the 80s AD, the latter a late Augustan re-build, re-dedicated by Tiberius in 10 AD. Domitian's statue turns its back on the past and looks forward to the future. The statue rises above the temples and looks on his new palace while keeping an eye on the Vestals (1.1.32-6). The statue is also an inspiration for those working on Domitian's ambitious building programme (1.1.61-5). Even Marcus Curtius, the saviour of Rome represented at the centre of the forum by the *lacus Curtius*, is happy to relax in the metaphorical shadows of the statue of the man who saved Rome four times (1.1.74-83).[246] The site traditionally at the very centre of the *forum Romanum* graciously steps to one side and allows Domitian's

198-9 suggests that the reference may simply be to free birth rather than lost equestrian rank; Zeiner (2005) 55. However, there is no need to believe as Nauta (2002) 198-9 does that: 'if Statius had wished to convey that his father's family was equestrian, he would probably have said so.'

[245] Another act of re-inscribing and restoration of monuments is alluded to in Statius' reference to Basilica Aemilia (*illinc belligeri sublimis regia Pauli*, 1.1.30) which is ascribed to a Paullus. The original basilica was constructed by L. Aemilius Lepidus, censor in 179 BC, but was restored twice, by L. Aemilius Paullus, consul in 50 BC, and by Paullus Aemilius Lepidus, suffect consul in 34 BC. Is the re-naming unwitting or another example of Domitianic restoration?

[246] Statius surpasses Virgil while Domitian surpasses Curtius. Curtius' damp, vegetal appearance (1.1.69-70) bears a resemblance to Virgil's Tibur (*Aen.* 8.30-34) and his alarm at the initial sight of the giant statue is reminiscent of Aeneas' fright at Mercury's appearance (*Aen.* 4.279-80). On Curtius generally, see Oakley (1998) 96-102 and his bibliography.

super-statue to take its central place in Roman topography. *Silvae* 1.1 maps Domitianic re-building of Rome onto a literary text of praise.

As a Domitianic text that aims to overwrite the Augustan epic, Statius' *Thebaid* corresponds very neatly with this model of transformation. Like Domitian's temple restorations it uses the fabric of Augustan monuments, in this case literary monuments, and works with the language, culture and ideas of these to create an entirely new artefact. Domitian took Augustan temples and made them his own, Statius took the *Aeneid* and made it his own. If Domitian wanted to make himself a new and better Augustus, then Statius aimed to become his Virgil.

Statius' re-appropriation of Virgil needs to be viewed in the light of the Domitianic programme. Above all we need to read the *Thebaid* as a transformation of the *Aeneid* into a form suitable to the Rome of the late 1st century AD, a world which had changed substantially since the Augustan principate. One hundred years of autocracy had an enormous effect upon the political landscape with which all epic, even Statius' mythological epic, interacted. Wars of conquest, when they were fought at all, were fought on the far distant edges of the empire. Vespasian and Titus were both well known for their military prowess, and famously celebrated their triumph after the Jewish revolt.[247] Agricola's exploits in Britain conducted under the reigns of all three Flavians were recorded by his son-in-law.

Domitian's own campaigns were fought on other edges of empire, principally in Germany and east of the Danube. Even his quasi-*bellum civile* against Saturninus (Suet. *Dom.* 6.2) was fought on the edge of empire, involving fighting against the Chatti as much as against Roman legions.[248] Rome no longer directly experienced wars against foreign

[247] Juvenal 1.127-34 notes with disapproval the intrusion of a statue of an Egyptian, probably Tiberius Julius Alexander, among the triumphal statues celebrating the Jewish victory. Note that the monumentalisation of Flavian achievements continued into the 2nd Century. Juvenal's anti-Egyptian stance is also visible at 1.26-8 where he attacks Crispinus, an Egyptian who rose to equestrian status under Domitian, and again where he attacks the same Crispinus at 4.1. See Braund (1996b) *ad loc.* Juvenal's anti-Egyptian attitude may reflect Domitian's interest in the region as suggested by Darwall-Smith (1996) 150-3.

[248] See Griffin (2000a) 65-9. Cf. *Silvae* 3.3.168.

enemies. Moreover, Domitian's own foreign policy entailed a radical rethink of aggressive Roman expansionism. This strategy reflected a wider trend, as Mattern notes:

> 'the goals of Roman foreign policy – domination and humiliation of the enemy, which did not necessarily, for example, involve the occupation of new territory – made it easier to substitute propaganda for more substantial achievement; and an emperor motivated primarily by prestige concerns, rather than more familiar, geopolitical strategic preoccupations, might well find it easier and cheaper to propagandize.'[249]

Domitian wished to employ a holding strategy that combined defensive and reactive military operations with diplomacy, thus allowing him all the prestige and success he desired at the minimum of expense.[250] This was a strategy designed above all to avoid open warfare on more than one front at a time, a crucial move for the first emperor to spend such a substantial part of his reign outside Rome personally involved in his military adventures.[251] It was also an essential rule of thumb to avoid the piling up of legions in one place without the emperor's personal leadership; the exceptional situation of having five legions stationed in Upper Germany may have tempted Saturninus into revolt.[252]

Foreign wars were now related to the people of Rome at second or third hand, through literary accounts (e.g. Josephus' *Jewish War*, Statius' *de Bello Germanico*), monumental architecture (e.g. the Arch of Titus), triumphal spectacles (e.g. the triumph of 71 AD described at Josephus 7.123-57) and coins (e.g. Domitian announced *Germania capta*

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[249] Mattern (1999) 202. Cf. Gruen (1990); (1996) who argues that this was Augustus' policy as well.
[250] On Domitian's military and foreign policy, see Jones (1992) 126-59. More generally on Roman defensive strategy in the imperial period, see Mattern (1999) 109-22. Domitian's defensive attitude provoked powerful condemnation from Tacitus in particular, cf. *Agr.* 39.2; *Hist.* 1.2, and later authors. Jones (1992) 144-9 suggests that the lack of opportunities for military glory may have been a motive for Saturninus' revolt in 89 AD.
[251] Cf. Mattern (1999) 91-3.
[252] Griffin (2000a) 65-9.

on his coins).[253] Furthermore, the nature of warfare for the Roman aristocracy in particular had changed dramatically under the principate; their most tangible experience of fighting was through civil war. Indeed, the triumphs such as Josephus described were the exclusive province of emperors and their immediate families ever since Octavian denied *spolia opima* to Marcus Licinius Crassus in 29 BC (Dio 51.24) because he derived his power from the *princeps*, and exiled Cornelius Gallus for advertising too widely his accomplishments in Egypt. One hundred years later, the foreign policies of Domitian, whatever their wisdom, exacerbated further the unhappiness and anger of an increasingly disenfranchised senatorial class.[254] That traditional opportunity to display *virtus* no longer existed for the vast majority of the Roman élite.[255]

Active experience of war at Rome could only have been provided by the civil war of 69 AD, a war which catapulted Vespasian and his sons to power, but also resurrected the spectre of civil conflict in the Roman capital.[256] Some of the most potent and evocative images of Tacitus' *Histories* occur in his accounts of the civil war taking place in Rome itself. It is interesting to see that Statius also uses the same topography of Rome as an opportunity to reflect his emperor's best virtues. In Tacitus' account of the coup d'état against Galba, he places the deaths of significant individuals next to major Roman sites and monuments: Galba is attacked in front of the Senate and people in the Forum (*Hist.* 1.40) and butchered by the *lacus Curtius* (1.41), his lieutenant Titus Vinius is murdered in front of the temple of the deified Julius Caesar (1.42), and Galba's designated successor, Piso, is dragged out of the temple of Vesta and killed on the steps (1.43). In Tacitus' memory at any rate, civil war pollutes Roman religion and Roman history and the very fabric of Rome

[253] Cf. Martial 6.4.2-4, *cum tot iam tibi debeat triumphos, | tot nascentia templa, tot renata, | tot spectacula, tot deos, tot urbes*; Cody (2003); Henderson (2003); Beard (2003).
[254] For criticism of Domitian's German campaigns, Dio 67.4.1; Tac. *Ger.* 37.6 *triumphati magis quam victi sunt*. For criticism of his peace with Decebalus, see Pliny *Pan.* 12.2; Dio 67.7. Cf. also Tac. *Hist.* 1.2 *perdomita Britannia et statim omissa*. On Domitian's withdrawal from Britain, see Strobel (1987).
[255] More on this theme below, p.92. Cf. Habinek (2000); Mayer (2001) 1-12.
[256] Cf. Ahl (1986) 2814; Henderson (1991) 34; Gowing (2005) 102-9.

itself.[257] We have already seen that this same topography, especially Caesar's temple and the *lacus Curtius*, is a crucial element in Statius' portrayal of Domitian's equestrian statue in *Silvae* 1.1.[258] Statius' poem promotes images and iconography more appropriate to the centre of the Roman world than the slaughter of an unarmed old man (*inermem et senem trucidare*, Tac. *Hist.* 1.40.2). Where the lake was a witness to the slaughter of a Roman emperor, it becomes an active, personified witness of Domitian's multiple heroisms:

> semel auctor ego inventorque salutis
> Romuleae: tu bella Iovis, tu proelia Rheni,
> tu civile nefas, tu tardum in foedera montem
> longo Marte domas.
>
> (*Silvae* 1.1.78-81)

Similarly, in his description of the fighting in Rome between the Vitellians and Flavians, Tacitus calls the firing of the Capitol the most terrible and foulest thing to have happened in the city (*id facinus post conditam urbem luctuosissimum foedissimumque rei publicae populi Romani accidit*, *Hist.* 3.72.1) and later likens the populace to spectators at the games (a forward glance through historical time at the Flavian amphitheatre?), such is the corrupting effect of peace and luxury (*prorsus ut eandem civitatem et furere crederes et lascivere*, 3.83.2).[259] The opportunity to view the spectacle of the self-destructive and sordid violence is not limited to the human inhabitants of the city; Tacitus even extends this point of view to include the buildings themselves, which look down upon the civil conflict around them.[260] Indeed, the immoral gaze of the *spectator populus* viewing fighting as if it were in the arena (3.83.1) is in direct contrast to the point of view and morality of the personified

[257] See Edwards (1996) 74-7; Damon (2003) *ad loc*; Ash (2006). On the city of Rome in the *Histories*, see Rouveret (1991) 3069-72.
[258] Cf. Ahl (1984) 91-101; Henderson (2003) 238-9. We might read Tacitus' account as reacting as much to Statius' depiction of Domitianic Rome as it is to the events he describes at this point.
[259] See Wellesley (1972) *ad loc.*; Edwards (1996) 78-80. On the topography in Tacitus' *Histories* 3, see Wiseman (1978); Wellesley (1981).
[260] See Ash (2006).

Capitol. Yet the burning of the capitol becomes a defining moment in Domitianic ideology, a battle where (according to his supporters at any rate) the youthful Domitian defended Jupiter's seat (cf. *Thebaid* 1.21-2; *Silvae* 1.1.79) and the temple of Capitoline Jupiter was a site that the emperor rebuilt in later years. The Capitol is the place where Domitian displays his *virtus* and his *pietas*.[261]

If Statius began the *Thebaid* in 80 AD, this war must have been fresh in the memory for its author much more than any other (including all the German and Dacian wars to which he refers so often). If Statius' 'historical memory' was taken up to a considerable extent by the civil war of 69, then his 'literary memory' was occupied in similar fashion by Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, the poem which we saw exerting a powerful intertextual influence over the *Thebaid*'s prologue and sphragis and one which Statius alludes to directly with great reverence in *Silvae* 2.7.[262] The civil war of 69 and the idea of civil war in Roman literature undoubtedly had an enormous influence upon Statius' concept of *fraternas acies*, but the Flavian and Domitianic desire to *rewrite* affects not only Statius' relationship with Virgil, but also his relationship with civil war both in history and literature.

Such considerations will inform the discussion of virtues in this and the following chapter. The discussion will not, due to the pressures of space, be comprehensive, but instead will concentrate on two key virtues in the both the Virgilian and Statian epic programmes, *virtus* and *pietas*.[263] These two are critical elements in the *Aeneid*, and the conception of Aeneas as a leader and ruler is framed in terms of *virtus* and *pietas*. Whatever our ultimate appraisal of Aeneas himself, this is the language that we all must use in our discussion of his character. For Virgil, these two qualities were crucial in establishing Aeneas as the archetypal good leader (even if we also read Virgil as undercutting this

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[261] Generally on imperial virtues, see Charlesworth (1937); Wallace-Hadrill (1981); Fears (1981b) Classen (1991). On communication of imperial virtues through coinage, see Norena (2001). On imperial virtues in late antique panegyrics, see Seager (1984); Whitby (1998).

[262] See Malamud (1995); Lovatt (1999) for details.

[263] As ever, a comprehensive bibliography is impossible. The classic discussion of Aeneas as 'good king' is Cairns (1989). Other useful discussions are Wright (1997); cf. Harris (2001) 217-8, 246-7. For a brief discussion of virtues in Lucan and Statius, see Fantham (1995), for broader discussions in Flavian epic, see Ripoll (1998); in Statius, see Delarue (2000). On *virtus* in Lucan, cf. Leigh (1997) esp. 158-90.

presentation throughout the poem). In other words, these are the terms that Virgil used for articulating any presentation of heroes and monarchs and assessing these characters. Yet Statius inherited these terms mediated through a century of literary reception and re-appropriation. Much as the history of imperial autocracy had changed the nature of the principate from Augustan time, so the writing of Ovid, Seneca and especially Lucan had transformed the nature of Virgilian *virtus* and *pietas*. For Lucan these virtues were corrupt and defunct. The landscape of civil war in his epic rendered virtues counterproductive and identical to their corresponding vices: *scelerique nefando | nomen erit virtus* (*BC* 1.667-8).[264] We might also compare Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, a play that also uses *virtus* and *pietas* to characterise Hercules from his first appearance.[265] Hercules will become a monstrous tyrant who wants to attack the heavens (*HF* 955-73, making Hercules a precursor to Statius' Tydeus, Hippomedon and Capaneus); he kills his children and his wife, believing her to be Juno (*HF* 1016-28) in a gigantic act of *impietas*. Ultimately his suicide will be construed as an act of *pietas* conquering *virtus*,[266] exploding the myth of the sufficiency of *virtus*.

Statius inherits both the Virgilian picture of virtues and imperial literature's gradual and derogatory reassessment. Statius also operates within the Virgilian framework of *virtus* and *pietas* – he must as a writer of Roman epic – and incorporates Lucan's negativity and pessimism. Yet he follows neither poet blindly and utilises the visions of both in the creation of his own picture of these virtues. Like Virgil, Statius articulates his assessment of kings and heroes through the vocabulary of *virtus* and *pietas*. Like Lucan, he is strongly pessimistic in the interpretation of these values. However, Statius' poem contains two crucial differences from that of Lucan. Firstly, the world of *fraternae acies* that the *Thebaid* depicts is not an uncomplicated account of civil war. Secondly, Statius (perhaps by virtue of having completed his poem) can progress from Lucan's negative attitude towards *virtus* and

[264] Such redeployment of terminology is a Thucydidean motif, but is also present in, e.g. Tac. *Hist.* 2.101, esp. *scriptores temporum, qui potiente rerum Flavia domo monimenta bella huiusce composuerunt, curam pacis et amorem rei publicae, corruptas in adulationem causas, tradidere.*
[265] See Lawall (1983).
[266] Lawall (1983) 21-6.

pietas. We will begin by re-assessing the nature of the conflict that Statius presents, then briefly examine the role of virtue within this context, then look for possible solutions and advances from this position.

ii. What kind of war?

Defining conflict in Statius' *Thebaid* is a tricky business. Statius realised more than most that understanding the nature of a conflict is as much a question of focalisation as it is of ideology. Henderson's analysis presents the issue clearly.[267] What kind of war is depicted in the *Thebaid* depends on one's point of view. All the male protagonists depict the war as a legitimate exercise. This is emphatically not civil war; all evil acts are permissible when the end justifies the means. The way in which this (male) legitimation affects our understanding of *virtus* and *pietas* will be explored further below, but for the moment we should note that for every male protagonist, the conflicts between Thebes and Argos, and later between Thebes and Athens, are emphatically *not* civil wars. However we perceive the events that take place within these conflicts, they are wars between sovereign nation states. For the female characters, by contrast, the nature of the war is irrelevant, it is the suffering that war causes that is important. For female characters in the *Thebaid*, mourning and proper disposal of male bodies assumes a competitive, almost combative mien. As we shall see in a moment, Argia and Antigone's burial of Polynices mimics the conflict of Eteocles and Polynices. At the end of the poem, the lamenting of the Theban women assumes a Bacchanalian appearance. Disturbingly, the women mourn as though demanding a new, great crime, *magnum quas poscere credas | aut fecisse nefas*, 12.792-3. Statius cannot tell of such mourning as it would effectively require a new epic, 12.797-809.[268]

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[267] Henderson (1993) 170-1.

[268] In their burial of Polynices, Argia and Antigone demonstrate both competitive and combative characters, see Schetter (1960) 11-12; Vessey (1973) 131-3; Frings (1991) 153-4; Henderson (1993) 186; Taisne (1994) 76-7; Hershkowitz (1998) 293-6. On the end of the poem, see Hershkowitz (1998) 38-9, 269-70; Keith (2000) 99-100.

Yet Henderson's catalogue of motivations sidesteps two important issues. Firstly, we should notice the way in which the differences between male characters in the *Thebaid* collapse into a singular point of view and a singular desire for authority. Eteocles and Polynices, for all their differences, are two sides of the same corrupt coin. The Creon who assumes power in Thebes following the mutual fratricide is markedly different from the humane and reasonable Creon of the first eleven books. In book 12 he becomes much closer in character to Eteocles and Oedipus. This issue will be tackled in greater depth in chapter 5, but we should note for the moment the tendency for individual male desire in Statius to be subsumed in what almost amounts to a collective desire to win in battle and take power.

Secondly, we should note the pervasive and authoritative point of view that the author himself presents in his poem. Statius' authorial persona provides us with a great deal of our understanding of the nature of conflict within the poem. While male characters justify war in the *Thebaid* as a legal enterprise, and female characters use grief as a response to the destruction of war, it is the author himself who plays up the fraternal nature of this conflict, both in his own comments (to which we will return in a moment) and in the way he presents conflict in the poem. The fraternal conflict might be limited to two brothers, since this is a story of *fraternas acies* and not *bella plus quam civilia* after all. Yet the perverted nature of the fraternal conflict colours all conflicts within the poem. The values of the poem are programmatically listed in the opening two lines:

> fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis
> decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas
>
> (*Theb.* 1.1-2)

The conflicts that Statius will describe are *all* fraternal and *alterna* suggests that there is potentially no end-point, that each victory will automatically trigger another conflict. All involve alternation, unnatural hatreds and all centre on guilty Thebes. The programmatic

impetus of Statius' poem is picked up in the poet's condemnation of the brothers following *their mutual slaughter:*

> ite truces animae funestaque Tartara leto
> *polluite et cunctas Erebi consumite poenas!*
> vosque malis hominum, Stygiae, iam parcite, divae:
> omnibus in terris scelus hoc omnique sub aevo
> viderit una dies, monstrumque infame futuris
> excidat, et soli memorent haec proelia reges.
>
> (*Theb.* 11.574-9)

The theme of fraternal conflict dominates other, strictly speaking non-fraternal conflicts in the poem. Hardie has demonstrated the importance of brothers and doubles as a theme in the *Thebaid* and other Roman epic.[269] Bonds has illustrated how the fight between Tydeus and Polynices in Book 2 is carefully constructed so as to anticipate and replicate the final, fatal duel between Polynices and Eteocles in Book 11.[270] One final example should serve to reveal the extent to which *fraternas acies* permeates the narrative. The cremation of Polynices' body by Antigone and Argia at 12.349-463 reflects the importance of fraternal conflict.[271] Creon attempts to keep Antigone locked away because she is to be feared (*rex iubet ipse timeri*, 12.352),[272] and Antigone is certainly frightening in demeanour:

> erumpit muris: fremitu quo territat agros
> *virginis ira leae, rabies cui libera tandem*
> et primus sine matre furor.
>
> (*Theb.* 12.356-8)

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[269] Hardie (1992).
[270] Bonds (1985). Cf. Frings (1992) 47-54.
[271] Cf. Frings (1991) 149-52.
[272] Although the text here may be corrupt, the φ group of manuscripts has *teneri*, and one editor has suggested *tueri*: see Hill (1983) *ad loc.*

Her extreme passion is represented by *ira*, *rabies* and *furor*, three terms which serve to identify her with her brothers,[273] and she is compared to a lion, an animal image which has thus far in the poem been used to describe (usually transgressive, impious) male protagonists. The two women are frighteningly aggressive and belligerent in their desire to dispose of Polynices' body. Argia assumes a manly aspect in taking on her potentially suicidal, solo mission (*hic non femineae subitum virtutis amorem | colligit Argia, sexuque immane relicto | tractat opus*, 12.177-9). Piety also inspires Argia (*hortantur pietas ignesque pudici*, 12.186) in a disturbing manner we might normally associate with *furor*.[274] Like Antigone, Argia's passions are inflamed by a desire to bury Polynices (*his anxia mentem | aegrescit furiis et, qui castissumus ardor, | funus amat*, 12.193-5). The use of *funus* to represent Polynices plays upon the suicidal nature of Argia's mission; she not only loves the dead man, but will actively seek out death itself. Antigone and Argia share extreme piety and virtue in wishing to bury brother/husband, but these virtues are so extreme that they assume negative characteristics.

This display of Virgilian, manly virtues takes place in secret, under cover of darkness. Antigone can only slip away when her guards snatch a moment's sleep (*ut paulum inmisso cessit statio horrida somno*, 12.355); she finds Argia by starlight and the fire of torches (*astrorum radiis et utraque a lampade vidit*, 12.365). The nature of the sharing out of Polynices' funeral rites is instantly competitive; Antigone aggressively questions Argia when she finds her on the battlefield (*'cuius' ait 'manes, aut quae temeraria quaeris | nocte mea?'* 12.366-7). This ought to be Antigone's night; after all, the most famous literary

[273] On *furor* see especially Hershkowitz (1998) 292-6, who emphasises the paradox of impure virginity in both Antigone and Argia. On the terminology as used of Antigone's brothers, see Bonds (1985); Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) *passim*.

[274] Cf. Vessey (1973) 132. Here, as so often in the poem, we could easily take the abstract noun as subject as a personification, *Pietas*. See Feeney (1991), and cf. Capaneus' invocation of qualities/personifications below, p.160.

accounts of Polynices' burial have Antigone as the sole mourner.[275] Moreover, the image of the lioness possessively protecting a corpse is not a comfortable one; Antigone too stirs herself for manly deeds. Later she berates herself for coming second in the race to the corpse and allowing her companion/opponent a head-start (*pudet heu! pietas ignava sororis*, 12.384). The burial becomes an athletic competition. The description of the two mourning over the corpse is also laden with disturbing imagery:

> hic pariter lapsae iunctoque per ipsum
> amplexu miscent avidae lacrimasque comasque,
> partitaeque artus redeunt alterna gementes
> ad vultum et cara vicibus cervice fruuntur.
>
> (*Theb.* 12.385-8)

The alternate groaning of sister and wife (*alterna gementes*, 387) is uncomfortably close to the alternation of rule that set Eteocles and Polynices on a path to mutual murder at the beginning of the poem (*alterna regna*, 1.1). The emotions depicted in *avidae* and *fruuntur* are disturbing and both terms carry strong sexual overtones.[276] Violence too is implicit in the imagery. Argia and Antigone, just as the women of Thebes will later on (12.789-93), come to resemble Bacchants tearing the body apart. Polynices' corpse becomes a list of body parts (*artus... vultum... cervice*) that can be divided (*partitae*) and shared between the women (*vicibus*), and that are separated by the very act of mourning. The image of the body torn apart and the sexual language of this passage combine to suggest

[275] Antigone's question demonstrates a literary self-awareness. So too Argia's question on arriving on the battlefield, *ubi inclyta fama | Antigone?* 12.331-2. See Feeney (1991) 340-3; Hardie (1993) 36; Hershkowitz (1998) 296n.108.

[276] Argia and Antigone's joy at performing the burial seems quite different from, e.g. the *misera laetitia* in the burial scene at Tac. *Hist.* 2.45. Cf. the sexualised language of Oedipus' mourning at *Theb.* 11.624-6 with Henderson (1991) 49 and Argia's kissing of the body at 12.318-21. For the sexual language of this passage, see Adams (1982) 179 (*iungo*), 181 (*amplector*), 180-1 (*misceo*), 198 (*fruor*). Cf. also Henderson (1991) 74-5n.150; (1993) 186); Hershkowitz (1998) 294n.99.

Bacchanalian dismemberment, such as Polynices' ancestor, Pentheus, suffered,[277] or the even more horrific and grisly dismemberment of Seneca's Hippolytus (Sen. *Phaedra* 1093-1110 for the messenger's account of Hippolytus' dismemberment, 1254-68 for Theseus' attempt to reconstitute the body).[278] The disturbing image of mourning women as Bacchants is one that will be reused at the very end of the poem (12.789-96). When Argia and Antigone are captured by Creon's men, both women regain their competitive spirit in seeking responsibility for Polynices' cremation:

> ambitur saeva de morte animosaque leti
> *spes furit: haec fratris rapuisse, haec coniugis artus*
> contendunt vicibusque probant: 'ego corpus', 'ego ignes',
> 'me pietas', 'me duxit amor'. deposcere saeva
> supplicia et dextras iuvat insertare catenis.
> nusquam illa alternis modo quae reverentia verbis,
> iram odiumque putes; tantus discordat utrimque
> clamor, et ad regem qui deprendere trahuntur.
>
> (*Theb.* 12.456-63)

Astonishingly, this display of *virtus* and *pietas* has become indistinguishable from anger and hatred. The emotions that govern that conflict between the brothers determine the nature of their funeral. Again, the language of competition is evident (*contendunt... probant... discordat*). The struggle between the two women to see who can achieve the greatest level of *pietas* echoes earlier competitions between Tydeus and Polynices and between Eteocles and Polynices. The competition has acquired all the manly

[277] In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Cadmus and Agave apparently perform this mourning operation in reverse and 're-assemble' Pentheus' constituent body parts for burial, cf. *Bacchae* 1298-1329. The description of a female mourner as Maenad or Bacchant is fairly common in Greek literature. For Andromache as a Maenad, see *Iliad* 6.389; 22.460; for a lamenting chorus as Maenadic, Aes. *Sept.* 836; Hecuba mourning for Polymestor, see Eur. *Hec.* 686-7; Antigone for her mother and brothers, Eur. *Phoen.* 1488-9; Evadne as a Bacchant who will later end in Hades, Eur. *Supp.* 1000-1.

[278] See Coffey & Mayer (1990) 17-18; ad 1256-61; cf. Most (1992) on extreme violence in Seneca.

characteristics of an epic struggle as Argia and Antigone display *virtus* and *pietas*. More specifically, this is a Statian epic struggle, qualified by the language of alternation (*haec/haec... vicibus... ego/ego... me/me... alternis verbis... discordat utrimque*). The two women (one from Thebes, one from Argos) direct their anger at each other and at themselves.[279] The agonistic element in their display reminds us that 'proper' burial in epic is usually accompanied by funeral games. Here we get an uncomfortable fusion of burial and competition. Their display of *virtus* and *pietas* is ultimately self-destructive; their actions are displayed as suicidal in intent (*ambae hilares et mortis amore superbae | ensibus intentant iugulos regemque cruentum | destituunt*, 12.679-81).[280]

A number of important and consistent features of the *Thebaid* are borne out by this episode. Firstly, the same madness and irrationality that determines its primary conflict governs deeds and actions in the *Thebaid*. The competitive enactment of funerary rituals conflates anger and piety at intellectual and literal levels; the funeral literally re-enacts the fratricidal duel as the flame splits in two (12.429-46). Secondly, the *Thebaid* describes actions and deeds in terms of *virtus* and *pietas*, both such important virtues in the discourse of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus we can see that the destructive emotions and madness that govern the darkest and most evil activities in the poem operate in the same intellectual space as the most positive qualities of Virgilian epic; thus the *pietas* of Argia and Antigone can be equated with fraternal hatred. Finally, *virtus* and *pietas* therefore become hugely negative terms in Statius' epic. They are enormously powerful destructive forces. What we have seen in the cremation episode is not the first instance of such themes in Statius' epic, but the culmination of a constant process of re-evaluation of *virtus* and *pietas* that takes place throughout the poem. We will explore the role of both qualities in the poem, beginning with *virtus* and moving then to *pietas*.

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[279] Cf. Frings (1991) 153-4; Henderson (1993) 186; Hershkowitz (1998a) 295.
[280] Argia certainly survives Creon's anger, *ut saevos narret vigiles Argia sorori* 12.804, and Antigone's fate is ultimately uncertain: see Hershkowitz (1998a) 296n.109.

2. Virtus.

In the Flavian era, *virtus* is a quality with uncomfortable connotations. For the aristocracy, the opportunities for acquiring and displaying *virtus* were no longer available. For an aristocratic Roman wishing to succeed in public life there were three areas of public activity in which he could compete:[281] warfare, politics and law, and success in any or all of these led to the acquisition of status, reputation and renown.[282] Sallust explains *virtus* as something not only won by 'benefiting the state' (*bene facere rei publicae*, *Cat.* 3.1) but also by 'speaking well' (*bene dicere*, *3.1*; *cf. the link between speech and action at Cat. 1.6*).[283] Both *gloria* and *virtus* were crucial concepts for the republican (and indeed imperial) aristocracy, perhaps coterminous but not entirely synonymous;[284] and indeed it was generally assumed that *virtus* would followed by *gloria*.[285] Under the emperors, such aristocratic men were still required to perform the same roles in society, and were still rewarded, but these roles were reduced in scope, the rewards had changed, and all men were subordinate to the emperor himself.[286] This becomes especially true when one considers *virtus* in its purely martial sense; the acquisition of *virtus* on the battlefield was no longer a possibility that most members of the Roman elite could contemplate seriously, and, should they acquire a military reputation, it would often arouse the jealousy of the current emperor. Tacitus draws an effective if implicit contrast between Germans and Romans when he

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[281] The term 'compete' is chosen carefully: aristocratic success in the republican period was often competitive, with success reached in opposition to others, rather than in harmony with them. Habinek (2001) describes the traditional aristocratic acquisition of *gloria* as a 'zero-sum game'. Such processes continued into the imperial period although they were no longer appropriate as such zero-sum competition could only ever have one winner, the emperor.

[282] For this commonplace see Cic. *Or.* 1.209-12, 2.226, 3.136; Livy 30.1.5, 39.40.5; Ov. *Am.* 1.15.4-6; Pliny *NH* 7.100.

[283] See Marincola (1997) 44.

[284] Habinek (2000) 267 defines *gloria* as: 'honour obtained for superior achievement in a comparative venue valued by the elite'. Cf. also Hellegouarc'h (1963) 369-83; Earl (1967) esp. 30; Kautsky (1982) 171. Mayer (2001) 5 defines *virtus* as: 'that Roman concept which incorporated a large ideal of excellence and publicly recognized achievement'. Note that achievement is central to both definitions; achievements that are witnessed by others are also central to the mechanics of *virtus* in Statius. Compare also Lendon (1997) esp. 34-47 on Roman honour.

[285] See Cic. *Font.* 49 *tum enim vitae socia virtus, mortis comes gloria fuisset*; *Tusc.* 1.109; *Arch.* 28; *Mil.* 97. Cf. Mayer (2001) 9-12.

[286] See Syme (1958) 607; (1991) 521-40; Mayer (2001) 3-5. On Domitian's attempts to redefine *virtus*, see Tuck (2005).

describes the power of German generals: *duces ex virtute sumunt* (*Ger.* 7.1). Habinek's recent article about Seneca (2000) clarifies Seneca's attempt to find a 'solution' to this problem by searching out a different, non-competitive (i.e. not diminishing imperial renown) form of brilliance for himself centred around the concept of *claritudo*.[287] Such a picture of changing roles and definitions is also drawn by Tacitus in two of his works, the *Agricola* and *Dialogus*, written at the end of the 1st century AD following the assassination of Domitian.[288] Tacitus, suffect consul in 97 AD, and his father-in-law Agricola, governor of Britain, had reached the highest pinnacles of the military and political world yet Tacitus' writings clearly reflect a malaise within the imperial aristocracy (even after Domitian's death):

> '[The *Agricola* and *Dialogus*] may be regarded as his attempt to come to terms with and describe for others the emptiness that he himself found at the end of the traditional paths to glory and prestige in Rome, paths which he and his father-in-law had so successfully trodden in their different ways.'[289]

Tacitus expresses his disillusionment with Roman society and its relationship with *virtus* and *gloria*. The *Agricola* portrays the career of a *vir militaris* under a bad emperor who grew jealous of Agricola's success and reputation (*Agr.* 39). Domitian arranged for false charges to be made against Agricola which were soon dropped (*Agr.* 41) and later obliged him to ask to be released from a proposed proconsulship (*Agr.* 42). Tacitus comes to the conclusion that great men such as Agricola can exist under a bad emperor and that success under imperial rule comes from moderation and cautiousness (*moderatione tamen prudentiaque*, 42.4), obedience and submission combined with hard work and energy (*obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint*, 42.5). Disobedience, flagrant

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[287] Habinek (2000). Tacitus also marks his account of Seneca's life and death with references to his outstanding nature which culminate in the report that Subrius Flavus regarded Seneca as fit to be emperor because of his *claritudo virtutum*, *Ann.* 15.65. Cf. also Valerius Maximus showing Republican *exempla* displaying *virtutes* in contrast to the Tiberian age: see Gowing (2005) 56-7.
[288] For the difficulties with precise dating, see Ogilvie & Richmond (1967) 7-11; Mayer (2001) 22-7. Such a picture can be constructed from Tacitus' later writings.
[289] Mayer (2001) 2.

disregard for an emperor's status and temper leads inevitably to an ostentatious and futile death (*sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt*, 42.5).[290] Agricola is not the only example of such a general. The Flavian general Antonius Primus was widely regarded as a brilliant general whose relationship with Vespasian was undermined partly by his rivalry with other jealous colleagues, especially Mucianus (Tac. *Hist.* 3.53, 4.80.2), and by Vespasian's deep ambivalence towards him (cf. esp. *Hist.* 4.80.2-3).[291] Mayer reflects upon the transformation of traditional republican values: 'Tacitus exposed the uselessness in the contemporary world of an old-fashioned realization of *virtus* in the military sphere. The splendour had gone out of the life of the successful general.'[292] Yet we should note that *virtus* can be acquired through these quieter and less ostentatious means: 'the contrast with the immediately following account of Agricola's death must be deliberate and reflect Tacitus' view that Agricola no less than the more controversial heroes of the time displayed *virtus*.'[293]

Tacitus' work examines the changes in the traditional Roman aristocrat's role in society, and in particular the value of *virtus* as a concept by which Roman aristocrats might be evaluated. The aristocratic Roman man could no longer engage in the same activities under an autocrat as his predecessors would have done during the Republic in order to obtain *gloria* and *virtus*. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the aristocratic class to secure a reputation that would survive in posterity, especially if one were attempting to be a good senator, advocate or general under an evil emperor. Both Seneca and Tacitus recognised that the nature of the Roman aristocratic class as a whole had changed under all emperors (not only, but especially, under the bad ones) and that *virtus* had changed with it.

In chronological terms, Seneca and Tacitus frame the Flavian era. The continuity in the understanding of *virtus* as it affects that contemporary world suggests that we should

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[290] There is another implicit contrast in Tacitus' observation of German funerals, *funerum nulla ambitio*, *Ger.* 27.1.
[291] See Ash (1999) 162-3. Cf. also the example of Domitius Corbulo restrained by Claudius, Tac. *Ann.* 11.20.1: see Syme (1958) 451.
[292] Mayer (2001) 9.
[293] Ogilvie & Richmond (1967) ad *Agr.* 42.4.

find similar points of view in the Flavian era and in Flavian epic poetry. In Silius' *Punica*, *virtus* is central to the action in the poem. Given the contemporary view that the Republican era was the golden age of aristocratic *virtus* and *gloria*, this is hardly surprising. The term is used proportionately more frequently in the *Punica* than in any other Roman epic poem.[294] For Silius, *virtus* is the peculiarly Roman quality that explains her success against the odds and her triumph against Carthage.[295] Thus it is something gained on the battlefield. Silius' notion of *virtus* is not of an uncomplicated or uniform quality (several characters display bad forms of *virtus*), but these debased forms of that quality lie in opposition to Scipio's *Romula virtus | certa iuncta fide* (*Pun.* 16.254-5).[296] In Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, we see relatively fewer references to *virtus* than in Silius or Statius, as is the case with Valerius' use of abstract vocabulary generally.[297] *Virtus* here is used in a restrictedly military sense, 'courage in fighting', and accords to the traditional Republican ideal which leads to *gloria*: 'la *virtus* n'est pas une fin en soi, mais le moyen d'acquérir la *gloria*, qui est le but essentiel de l'expédition.'[298] What is intriguing is that Valerius incorporates what seems a steadfastly *Roman* and *Republican* concept of *virtus* in a poem that depicts pre-Homeric subject-matter written for an imperial audience.

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[294] 80 times in over 12000 lines. Compare 40 times in the *Aeneid*, 62 times in the *Thebaid*. For these statistics see Eisenhut (1973) 163. For *virtus* in Silius, see Schönberger (1965) 139-40; Kissel (1979) 88-95; Ripoll (1998) 323-7.

[295] Cf. Cic. *Phil.* 4.13; Sall. *Jug.* 14.19; Livy 1.9.3; Virg. *Aen.* 12.827.

[296] For 'bad' *virtus*, see Viriasius (*virtute feroci*, 5.555), the Fabii (*aspera virtus*, 7.51), the Capuan Decius (*horrida virtus*, 11.205), and the traitor Taurea (*atrox virtus*, 13.369). Compare Virgil's Turnus and his *ferox virtus* (*Aen.* 12.19-20). The sense of old-fashioned values is even present in Silius' Scipio, whose *virtus* harks back to Romulus and the mythological past.

[297] 18 occurrences in over 5500 lines: see Ripoll (1998) 316-18.

[298] Ripoll (1998) 316.

i. Tydeus and the corrupting nature of *virtus*.

Statius is thus constructing *virtus* out of a background where the Roman aristocracy betrays great unease at the shifting nature of imperial society and its structure that reduces their traditional opportunities for self-aggrandisement. Moreover, this is an era where contemporary epic poets depict *virtus* in the form that writers such as Seneca and Tacitus hark back to so frequently, as a Republican, martial quality. On the surface, Statius works in a similar manner. *Virtus is here too a martial quality, gained through the defeat of the enemy* on the battlefield. Yet Statius' depiction has a more modern feel about it, especially given that the fighting in the poem is centred upon a civil conflict. His concept of *virtus* is debased and corrupted, even self-destructive, but is also displayed by super-powerful individuals on a battlefield infected by civil war who act as *exempla* to Statius' readers.[299] The Theban landscape of civil war asks the same moral questions that Tacitus' biographical, ethnographical and historiographical writings ask; Statius' heroes occupy much the same ground as Tacitus' controversial exponents of traditional *virtus*.

Among the seemingly more straightforward uses of virtus are indications of its destructive qualities. The opening of the battle in Book 8 (373-427) acts as a presentation of the Statian concept of *virtus*. As the still unblemished troops charge against one another, a huge shower of arrows and spears falls indiscriminately, described in a simile as a thunderstorm (8.407-11).[300] The effect of this storm of arrows is portrayed in intriguing terms:

> pulcher adhuc belli vultus: stant vertice coni,
> *plena armenta viris, nulli sine praeside currus,*
> arma loco, splendent clipei pharetraeque decorae
> cingulaque et nondum deforme cruoribus aurum.

[299] In general on exemplarity, see Chaplin (2000) with Roller (2001b).
[300] Cf. Ovid *Met.* 5.158; Lucan *BC* 6.134.

at postquam rabies et vitae prodiga virtus

emisere animos...

nec locus ad terram telis: in corpora ferrum

omne cadit; saepe ignari perimuntque caduntque

casus agit virtutis opus...

(*Theb.* 8.402-7, 419-21)

Once again, this display of manly virtue is something that is hidden from the light of day, giving it a sinister aspect. Such is the number of weapons in the sky that the light is shut out (*exclusere diem telis, stant ferrea caelo | nubila, nec iaculis artatus sufficit aer*, 8.412-13). *Virtus* is equated with *rabies* and is wasteful of life (*vitae prodiga ... | emisere animos*); the phrasing is vague enough to suggest that *virtus* is profligate of *all* lives; Statius' choice of vocabulary and associations anticipates the night mission of Antigone and Argia. The cloud of weapons falls and kills at random, but paradoxically there are so many arrows that every one finds a target. Statius indulges his audience in the hyperbole and illogicality so common in Lucan's civil war epic. The effect of this paradoxical phrase is to emphasise the super-destructiveness of war (*omne cadit*) and its random and unjust nature (*ignari, casus*). This description of the opening shots of the day's fighting also serves to denigrate the quality of *virtus* by equating it with the furious destruction that all wars cause (*rabies et... virtus*)[301] and the randomness of that destruction (*casus agit virtutibus opus*).[302] The opening lines of the passage quoted also highlights the ugly nature of war. *Pulcher vultus* evokes the young men who will fight in this war (we think in particular of Parthenopaeus);

[301] *Rabies* is also used to describe Tydeus' cannibalism, *Theb.* 9.1. Statius avoids using more neutral terms such as *ira*. We should note Braund & Gilbert's appealing reading of *ira* in Peripatetic as opposed to Stoic terms as a necessary quality in battle, and therefore, one assumes, in *virtus*: see Braund & Gilbert (2003) 253-6, 274-5. They do note that *ira* can go beyond 'appropriate' levels and use Tydeus' cannibalism as an example, 275-8. The dividing line between 'good anger' and 'bad anger' remains unclear. The language in this passage suggests that this battle scene has also been infected by fraternal strife and that the *virtus* of all the combatants is similarly infected.

[302] Note also 8.414-8, where the anonymity of those fighting is emphasised and the text hints at the discourse of civil war, esp. *mutua perdunt | vulnera*.

even those who survive will be 'made ugly by blood' (*deforme cruoribus*). Statius gives a negative picture of *virtus*, presenting it as an ugly, destructive force.

The personified goddess Virtus does little to dispel this unsettling image. Feeney has pointed out that earlier encounters with Virtus see her in unsettling company: she follows in Bacchus' train with Ira, Furor, Metus and Ardor (4.661-2) and sits incongruously in the House of Mars with Ira, Metus, Furor, Impetus, Nefas, Discordia, Minae and Mors (7.47-53).[303] The association between Virtus and Death is further exploited when she turns Amphiaraus away from sky-gazing as he rides to his death (*avertit morti contermina Virtus*, 7.702). Her most important role comes in Book 10 as the inspirer of Menoeceus' suicide (see chapters 4 and 5). There she is depicted arriving on earth with her feet touching the ground and head near the sky, making her strongly evocative of Homer's Eris and Virgil's Fama.[304] The deity is equally destructive; she takes Thebes' most effective fighter away from the field and instigates his suicide. The ugliness of the battle-scene in Book 8 is replicated by Virtus' unseemliness as female deity representing manly quality (*virtus*) disguises herself as female non-combatant, in order to take warriors away from the fighting.[305]

The portrayal of *virtus* in the anonymous scene of fighting and in the description of the personified goddess is amplified when named characters are involved. Following Polynices' rejection and exile from Thebes at the beginning of the *Thebaid*, he wanders through a storm and arrives at the porch of Adrastus' palace in Argos (1.386-9).[306] Taking refuge, he discovers another exile likewise taking shelter. Both men are so filled with bloody rage (*rabiem...cruentam* 1.408) that they wrestle and fight for the right to stay in the porch:

ecce autem antiquam fato Calydona relinquens

Olenius Tydeus (fraterni sanguinis illum

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[303] See Feeney (1991) 382-5. Cf. Smolenaars (1994) ad 7.47-53.
[304] *Iliad* 4.442-3; *Aen.* 4.176-7. For the close association between Zeus and Eris, cf. *Iliad* 11.3, 73-81.
[305] See Feeney (1991) 383-4 who notes the description of the disguise as indecorous, *paulum decoris permansit*, 10.642, and the inappropriate simile likening Virtus to Hercules disguised as a woman, 10.645-9.
[306] Storm imagery is also used in the scene in book 8.407-11.

conscius horror agit) eadem, sub nocte sopora,

lustra terit...

...paulum alternis in verba minasque

cunctantur, mox ut iactis sermonibus irae

intumuere satis, tum vero erectus uterque

exsertare umeros nudamque lacessere pugnam.

celsior ille gradu procera in membra simulque

integer annorum; sed non et viribus infra

Tydea fert animus, totosque infusa per artus

maior in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus.

(1.401-4, 410-417)

The passage sets up a series of associations which are consistently exploited throughout Tydeus' involvement in the *Thebaid*. Alternation is again a key concept in this conflict, as Tydeus briefly acts as a substitute for Eteocles.[307] Tydeus' *virtus* is constantly linked with extreme emotion (especially, though not exclusively, with *rabies*) and also with physical prowess and strength (413-7 above).[308] Statius' introduction to Tydeus is informed by a series of intertextual references to Greek literature. Tydeus' small size is mentioned by Athene at *Iliad* 5.801, the ignoble nature of the fight mirrors the fight between Odysseus and Irus (*Odyssey* 18.1-117), although this fight is far more violent (*Theb.* 1.418-27).[309] Yet the difference in stature is also a feature of single combat narrative in historiography; despite being the smaller of the two, Tydeus will win and his prowess reflects his greater *virtus* at

[307] See Bonds (1985) especially for similarities between this fight and the duel between Eteocles and Polynices.

[308] On the link between *ira*, martial prowess and extremes of emotion, see Braund & Gilbert (2003) 275-8. On *rabies*, cf. Dewar (1991) on 9.1-2. Note also *regnabat* which introduces the idea of self-control, and in particular that *virtus* controls the body.

[309] The ultimate source for the fight may be Eur. *Phoen.* 420ff.; *Supp.* 134ff. On this aspect of the fight, see Bonds (1985) 226.

the expense of Polynices.[310] The violence of the fight, which might have ended in death had Adrastus not intervened (*Theb.* 1.428-34), is also mirrored in the violence of emotion in the two men. Polynices will not have this depth of emotion again until he fights his brother.[311] Tydeus is similarly consumed by 'bloody rage' (*rabiem cruentam* 1.408, cf. 9.1) and motivated to kill Polynices by anger (*sic ira ferebat* 1.428).[312] The imagery of athletic competition is used to illustrate the nature of this fight:

> non aliter quam Pisaeo sua lustra Tonanti
> cum redeunt crudisque virum sudoribus ardet
> pulvis; at hinc teneros caveae dissensus ephebos
> concitat, exclusaeque exspectant praemia matres:
> sic alacres odio nullaque cupidine laudis
> *accensi incurrunt*
>
> (*Theb.* 1.421-6)

The simile compares the fight to wrestling at the Olympic games, but this fight is not the one taking place in the arena but a fight of hot-blooded (*alacres... accensi*) young men (*teneros ephebos*) outside the arena. *At hinc* provides a sudden disjunction between the 'proper' wrestling match in the simile and the one to which this fight is compared in the simile; there is something inherently wrong about this fight. The sense of spectacle is provided by *caveae*; despite the displacement of the fight outside the proper boundaries of wrestling, and despite the fact that in reality Tydeus and Polynices have no audience, they are surrounded and impelled by an audience, metonymically represented as the auditorium

[310] On single combat in historiography see Oakley (1998) 113-48 on the single combat between Manlius and the Gaul at Livy 7.9.6-10.14; (1998) 230-51 on the duel of Valerius Corvus at Livy 7.25.3-26.15; (2005) 216-17 on Livy 9.17.12. On the inequality of combatants see esp. (1998) p. 124. For bibliography on single combat see Oakley (1998) 125.

[311] See Bonds (1985) 227n.4.

[312] Indeed, Tydeus is characterised by anger, see Braund & Gilbert (2003) 270-4. *Rabies* again anticipates Tydeus' cannibalism at 8.751-66.

itself.[313] This emphasis on audience is another typical feature of single combat narratives in both epic and historiography.[314] The visual aspect of a fight that has no witnesses until Adrastus appears and immediately stops it is odd but giving such importance to others *seeing* impious actions becomes crucial especially in Statius' presentation of Tydeus, as we shall see below. The young men in the simile are struck (note the equally discordant metaphorical use of *concidat*) by the *dissensus* of the audience, an arresting term, unusual in epic poetry and used elsewhere to refer to the extreme state of discord within a city, especially one wracked by civil conflict.[315] Tydeus and Polynices fight the equivalent of civil war. There is no glory to be gained in this fight, just as the mothers in the simile will wait in vain for *praemia*. Yet before any more serious conclusion can be reached, Adrastus interrupts the fight, calms the combatants down and responds to their introductions. His analysis of their emotions and choice of words is revealing:

> 'quae causa furoris,
> *externi iuvenes (neque enim meus audeat istas*
> civis in usque manus), quis nam implacabilis ardor
> exturbare odiis tranquilla silentia noctis?'
>
> 'immo agite, et positis, quas nox inopinaque suasit
> aut virtus aut ira, minis succedite tecto.'
>
> (*Theb.* 1.438-41, 468-9)

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[313] *OLD* s.v. *cavea* 4. For the metonymic use, cf. *Theb.* 6.654; *Silv.* 1.6.28; for the more literal use, cf. *Silv.* 2.5.12.

[314] See Oakley (1998) 120. Cf. in poetry Eur. *Phoen.* 1370-1, 1388-9, 1395, 1398-9; Ap. Rhod. *Argo.* 2.36, 96-7; Virg. *Aen.* 5.451-2; Ov. *Met.* 7.120-1, 133, 142-3; Val. Fl. *Argo.* 4.257, 292; Sidon. *Carm.* 7.287-9; and in historiography Thuc. 7.71.1-6; Polybius 1.44.5; 3.43.8; Sall. *Jug.* 60.3-4; Livy 1.25.1-14; 7.10.2-12; 23.47.3; Dio 74.13.4; Procop. *Bell.* 1.13.32, 38; 7.31.16. Cf. also Solodow (1979) 257-8.

[315] The word does not occur in Ennius, Ovid *Met.*, Lucan, Silius or Valerius Flaccus, and only once in Virgil, at *Aen.* 11.455 to refer to the state of panic and confusion in the city as opposing armies prepare to renew hostilities. Statius uses the word twice elsewhere to refer to Lemnos prior to the women's slaughter of their husbands (5.148) and Thebes in panic prior to Menoeceus' suicide (10.558). Cf. also *seu dissensuros servaverat Eumenis ignes*, 12.423 as Statius ascribes possible reasons why Eteocles' pyre was the only one still burning.

Adrastus' opening words (*quae causa furoris*) mimic the programmatic utterances of epic poets. The search for *causae* is mentioned at the beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid* (*Musa, mihi causas memora* 1.8) and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* (*fert animus causas tantarum expromere rerum* 1.67).[316] Yet the question is highly evocative of Lucan's earlier question *quis furor, o cives?* (*BC* 1.8).[317] Adrastus' instant reaction to this fight is to relocate it into the context of epic civil war narrative. This may be an anticipation of things to come in the poem, given that Tydeus and Polynices will soon be brothers-in-law and given the carefully described similarities between this fight and the duel between Polynices and Eteocles in Book 11.[318] Adrastus' inability to distinguish between *ira* and *virtus* anticipates the conflation of *pietas* and *ira* that characterises Antigone and Argia's desire for death. Furthermore, Adrastus' speeches employ a variety of language to describe the motivational emotions behind the fight. *Furor, ardor, odium, nox, virtus* and *ira* all combine in this. *Furor* 'fury' and *odium* 'hate' give a negative aspect to *virtus*, especially when they are intertextually linked into the *causae* that provoke Lucanian civil war. *Ardor* 'burning' and *nox* 'night' give these emotional forces something of a hellish aspect, taking us beyond civil war into the darker realm of *fraternas acies*.

Tydeus remains a powerful employer of *virtus* when he is sent on his mission as ambassador to the court of Eteocles. Statius again invokes Homeric intertexts in order to emphasise the originality of his own conception. Tydeus' visit to the Thebans is mentioned at some length at *Iliad* 4.370-400,[319] but some details of his visit differ greatly. In Homer's version, Tydeus visits Thebes only when Polynices has raised an army and infuriates the

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[316] These utterances clearly evoke Horace *Epode* 7.1-2 *quo, quo scelesti ruitis? aut cur dexteris | aptantur enses conditi?* Such direct addresses have their origin in early Greek poetry, cf. Archilochus fr.109W; Callinus fr. 1W; Solon fr. 4W. See Mankin (1995) *ad loc.*; Watson (2003) *ad loc.*

[317] Comparisons are perhaps complicated further by Adrastus' insistence that these men are *externi*, behaving like foreigners rather than *cives*. The picture is complicated enormously by the multi-national nature of the Argive army (whose *cives* set the norm against which this behaviour is measured? How do we know how Argive *cives* behave?). However, the tensions and dynamics within the 'Argive' force is too large a subject for this chapter.

[318] See Bonds (1985) 227-33.

[319] It is also mentioned more briefly at *Iliad* 5.800-13; 10.284-91. See Vessey (1973) 141.

Thebans by beating them all in wrestling matches. Fifty Thebans, led by Maeon, the son of Haemon, and Polyphontes, ambushed Tydeus. Yet he killed all bar Maeon, whom the gods told him to release. The Homeric influence is still visible in the Statian text, but only just. The visit is now placed before the raising of an Argive army, perhaps to emphasise Eteocles as a tyrannical figure. Friendly wrestling is replaced by angry speeches (2.393-467; Tydeus does win a wrestling match at 6.826-910). He does kill 49 Thebans who ambush him, and spare Maeon (who has developed into a prophet), but the leader of the Thebans has now become the ominously named Chthonius (2.538-9).[320]

Tydeus displays the power of his own *virtus* in his battle against the fifty Thebans warriors. After his success against the fifty, Statius repeatedly refers to the *virtus* that Tydeus has used to gain victory. Eteocles cannot sleep because he is so worried that he had not counted on Tydeus' *virtus* overcoming so large a number of men (*nec numero virtutem animumque rependit* 3.8). As Tydeus returns to Argos he is compared to a bull who returns to familiar pastures exhausted and injured but victorious and with swelling *virtus* (*tunc quoque lassa tumet virtus multumque superbit* 3.333). Finally, as Tydeus sleeps after telling his tale in Argos, he even dreams of his *virtus* (*nam Tydea largus habebat | perfusum magna virtutis imagine somnus* 3.418-9).

Tydeus' journey is not remembered as a spectacularly unsuccessful ambassadorial trip to Thebes but for his defeat of the fifty men sent to kill him. The monomachy is a colossal *aristeia* for Tydeus, an exhibition of extraordinary *virtus*. Although no mention is made of Tydeus' *virtus* until long after the battle, we should be in no doubt that this singular quality is demonstrated here. As Hardie comments: 'the *aristeia* is above all a display of *virtus*.'[321] While the basic elements in Statius' narrative are based upon the *Iliad*, he draws significant inspiration from Scaeva's *aristeia* against Pompeian troops in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* 6 (141-262) which Leigh describes as: 'a meditation on the concept of *virtus*.'[322]

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[320] For the differences and correspondences between Homer and Statius, see Juhnke (1972) 72-7.
[321] Hardie (1993) 69. Hardie is referring specifically to the *aristeia* of Scaeva in Lucan *BC* 6, an important model for Tydeus' monomachy here and his *aristeia* in Book 8.
[322] Leigh (1997) 159. See 159n.1 for other analysis of this passage in modern scholarship.

Scaeva is also fighting the whole of Pompey's army on his own (*BC* 6.141-3) and makes defiant speeches (*BC* 6.150-65, 241-6; cf. *Theb.* 2.547-9, 661-8). Both Scaeva and Tydeus crush opponents with stones (*BC* 6.176-8; *Theb.* 2.559-66); both suffer a great number of wounds (*BC* 6.192-227; *Theb.* 2.604-7, 3.326-36). Like Tydeus, Scaeva is fuelled by anger (*BC* 6.155) and after his own extraordinary monomachy, his *virtus* is such that he becomes the living image of the goddess *Virtus* (*BC* 6.253-4). Lucan uses repeated similes of animals to describe Scaeva in his *aristeia:* he is like a leopard (*BC* 6.182-4), an African elephant (6.207-12) and a Pannonian bear (6.220-3). Likewise, Statius uses animal imagery to illustrate Tydeus' character in this and other episodes (1.395-7, 2.668-81, 8.474-5, 8.529-35).[323] Such imagery again serves to create an air of gladiatorial combat for these *aristeiai* (cf. *Theb.* 1.421-6).

However, although this is surprising in the context of so hyperbolic a battle-narrative, Statius actually tones down the hyperbole of Lucan's Scaeva episode. Scaeva literally defends the Caesarian camp against the whole of Pompey's army (*BC* 6.138-43), while Tydeus 'merely' defeats fifty men in battle. Statius only shows that Tydeus' wounds are numerous and non-fatal (2.640-7) while Lucan indulges us with a gory description of Scaeva's eye being pierced by an arrow, and the centurion pulling both out and trampling upon them (*BC* 6.214-9; cf. *Val. Max.* 3.2.23). Scaeva's face is so twisted by anger and so scarred by wounds that it becomes a shapeless stream of blood (6.224-5). The image is so powerful that Bartsch sees Scaeva as a ludicrous figure: 'so full of spears that he needs no more armour but becomes a kind of steel hedgehog inured to further attack, a ridiculous transformation of wounds into a shield, this paradox puts into play all the grotesque elements of horror and comedy, fantasy and reality.'[324] Statius makes a fantastic situation, one man defeating fifty, seem, if not more realistic, then more limited in its scope. The idea of limitation is important in Tydeus' demise. His assault upon an apparently unlimited enemy,

[323] See Bonds (1985) 232; Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 174-6; Braund & Gilbert (2003) 256-68. On the general theme of dehumanisation and animal imagery see Rieks (1967) 106, 125-30; Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999)171-206. On Tydeus' blood-thirstiness, see Kytzler (1962) 150; Vessey (1973) 222; Taisne (1994) 138.
[324] Bartsch (1997) 54.

the Theban army, results in his death. The fantastical nature of Tydeus' *aristeia* is also emphasised by *vix credet Fama reverso* (2.621). Subtle shifts in the contexts of very similar speeches illustrate the effects of Statius' reworking of the Lucanian episode. Scaeva delivers a powerful speech cursing his comrades' cowardice and urging them to join him in a glorious death. His comrades' reaction is to watch his *aristeia* as though it were a gladiatorial spectacle:[325]

> hic ubi quaerentis socios iam Marte relicto
> *tuta fugae cernit, 'quo vos pavor' inquit 'adegit*
> inpius et cunctis ignotus Caesaris armis?
> terga datis morti? cumulo vos desse virorum
> non pudet et bustis interque cadavera quaeri?'
> ...
> movit tantum vox illa furorem
> quantum non primo succendunt classica cantu,
> mirantesque virum atque avidi spectare secuntur
> scituri iuvenes, numero deprensa locoque
> an plus quam mortem virtus daret.
>
> (Lucan *BC* 6.149-54, 165-9)

Statius reverses the situation in this passage and instead puts a similar exhortatory speech in the mouth of Chromis, who exhorts the remaining members of the fifty:

> increpitans: 'unusne, viri, tot caedibus, unus
> ibit ovans Argos? vix credet Fama reverso.
> heu socii, nullaene manus, nulla arma valebunt?

[325] On this see Leigh (1997) 181-4.

haec regi promissa, Cydon, haec, Lampe, dabamus?'

(Theb. 2.620-3)

Inversion of Statius' primary epic model is at the heart of this speech. Chromis is one of the many whom Tydeus defeats. Indeed he dies instantly as he finishes this speech (on which see below). Where Scaeva looked forward eagerly to death and survived, Chromis fears defeat and is killed almost instantly. The sense of spectacle in Lucan's passage becomes a play on speech and sound when Chromis is killed in mid-speech with a spear in the mouth (2.624-5). The play on *unus/totus* highlighted in Lucan (*quem non mille simul turmis nec Caesare toto | auferret Fortuna locum victoribus unus | eripuit BC* 6.140-2)[326] is transformed into play upon the opposition of *unus/nulla*, revealing the weakness of the fifty. The inversion of the Lucanian model affects the moral interpretation of Tydeus' actions. Scaeva's *aristeia* is forever sullied because of its civil war context. Lucan's narratorial voice comments: *infelix, quanta dominum virtute parasti!* (*BC* 6.262). Bartsch's comment is as clear as Lucan's: 'poor fool, he does not realise the civil war has overturned the value system within which he thinks he fights.'[327] Scaeva is an *exemplum* of cosmic *virtus* and consuming *nefas*.[328]

Yet the context of Tydeus' *aristeia* is far less distinct than that of Scaeva. His action takes place within a poem whose overarching theme is *fraternas acies*, but he fights in self-defence against a vastly superior (in numerical terms anyway) force sent on an ambush (*lecta dolis sedes Theb.* 2.498) by an evil tyrant who has treacherously broken all the accepted codes of war regarding *legati* (as Tydeus terms himself, 3.351). Because of context, and a need to tone down the greatest rhetorical excesses of Lucan's narrative, Statius leaves open a potential for Tydeus' actions, his *virtus*, to be viewed in a positive light. Tydeus himself and the Argives undoubtedly see his *aristeia* in these terms (e.g. 3.333, 418-9), despite the fact that it becomes the first action in a morally dubious war. Tydeus' report of

[326] See Hardie (1993) 8.
[327] Bartsch (1997) 52.
[328] See Leigh (1997) 158-90 on Scaeva as an *exemplum*.

what has happened on his ambassadorial visit (3.348-65) opens with a phrase that recalls and exceeds the *Aeneid*'s opening words (*arma, arma viri Theb.* 3.348 literally doubles *arma virumque Aen.* 1.1) and recalls Aeneas' own cry in his darkest hour as Troy falls (*arma, viri, ferte arma! Aen.* 2.668, cf. *arma para Theb.* 3.350).[329] The effect is to reconfigure Virgilian epic in a Statian universe characterised by excess; whatever the moral implications, the 'spin' put on the reports of Tydeus' deeds, *virtus* is no longer an ideal but a destructive, corrupting force.[330] Furthermore, the theme of subverting epic models runs deeper in Tydeus' monomachy than its intertextual relationships with earlier epic narratives.

Two similes are key to the description of Tydeus in his monomachy. These are relevant because of the exceptionally destructive effects of Tydeus' *virtus*, and because of his ability to turn the epic world on its head – subverting epic intertexts and accepted mythology in Statius' own weird universe. *Virtus* not only subverts those who have it, and destroys those whom they fight, it corrupts the epic itself. In the first of these similes he is compared to a centaur fighting a Lapith as he hurls a boulder down at the Thebans:

> saxum ingens, quod vix plena cervice gementes
> vertere humo et muris valeant inferre iuvenci,
> rupibus avellit; dein toto sanguine nixus
> sustinet, inmanem quaerens librare ruinam,
> qualis in adversos Lapithas erexit inanem
> magnanimus cratera Pholus. stupet obvia leto

[329] The repetition suggests that he is shouting, as do the further rhetorical repetitions in the speech, *iuvat...iuvat* (354), *bello...bello* (355), *nunc...nunc...nunc* (360-2), *dum...dum...dum* (361-2), cf. *Theb.* 2.620-3. See Frings (1991) 39-44. Cf. also the Centaurs' cry *arma, arma* at Ovid *Met.* 12.241 and *arma, viri, rapite arma, viri* Sil. *Pun.* 4.99. See Wills (1996) 62-4 on this passage.

[330] The difference from the *Aeneid* is that we do not see a 'warped *virtus*' which is tainted by *ira* or *furor*, as Aeneas suffers at various points in the narrative, most notably at the poem's conclusion, but instead *virtus* itself is a corrupting quality. Cf. Wright (1997); Harris (2001) 217-18, 246-7; Braund & Gilbert (2003).

turba superstantem atque emissi turbine montis

obruitur;

(*Theb.* 2.559-66)

The passage does evoke the weapon throwing of Scaeva (*BC* 6.176-8) but is much closer to two Ovidian passages (themselves closely interrelated), the battle between Perseus and Phineus in *Metamorphoses* 5 (79-83) where Perseus crushes Eurytus with a *crater*, and the battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs in *Metamorphoses* 12 (236-40) where Theseus crushes a centaur named Eurytus with a *crater*, and a passage in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* 1 (335-8) where Aeson recalls his fight against the centaur Pholus, who was threatening him with a *crater* and whom he crushed with a golden cup.[331] *Inanem* (*Theb.* 2.563) is cleverly ironic, literally indicating an empty wine bowl but one which is anything but *inanis* as it crushes the Lapiths.[332] The series of intertextual references to *aristeiai* in Lucan and Ovid situates Tydeus' monomachy in the world of 'comic book violence'. His actions may seem less extreme than those of Scaeva, but the grotesque violence and massive odds against Tydeus all generate the same combination of horror, comedy and fantasy that Bartsch sees in Lucan's Scaeva. Moreover, both *crater* throwers in Ovid are human heroes, Perseus and Theseus (and Theseus' appearance in *Thebaid* 12 may complicate these intertextual correspondences still further), while Tydeus is instead compared to the Centaur who threatens Aeson but is himself crushed. The association with Pholus gives Tydeus a bestial quality, and arguably does so far more emphatically than the numerous animal similes that pervade Statius' epic and are used to describe all the heroes. The comparison with the centaur also hints at the destruction that will eventually be visited upon Tydeus. Moreover,

[331] On the connection with giants and centaurs in the characters of Tydeus, Hippomedon and Capaneus, see Klinnert (1970); Lovatt (2005) 119-39. Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 190-7 emphasises the monstrous association between Argive heroes and giants or centaurs, reading Tydeus' rock-throwing as a gesture of primitive violence, p.193. Cf. Turnus throwing rocks without force at *Aeneid* 12.896-901. The monstrous character of the association of man and horse is underlined by Rieks (1967) 211. Statius also evokes the battle between Lapiths and Centaurs at *Theb.* 5.261-4 and 6.535-40.

[332] *OLD* s.v. *inanis* 10 'unsubstantial', 13 'serving no purpose, vain, futile'.

the successful performance of Tydeus' rock throwing is disturbing. Statius reverses the epic pattern, where the human hero strikes and kills his opponent, and compares Tydeus to Pholus rather than a human hero.[333] It is the opponents' features that are crushed beyond recognition (2.568-9).

The second simile, comparing Tydeus to the hundred-handed Briareus, continues to invert and subvert. The simile illustrates Tydeus' compact defensive power against the crowd of enemies who get in each other's way and even entangle themselves in each other's weapons (2.586-94). Tydeus' defence is impressive, but the terms of simile are disturbing:

> non aliter Getica (si fas est credere) Phlegra
> armatum immensus Briareus stetit aethera contra,
> hinc Phoebi pharetras, hinc torvae Pallados angues,
> inde Pelethroniam praefixa cuspide pinum
> Martis, at hinc lasso mutata Pyracmoni temnens
> fulmina, cum toto nequiquam obsessus Olympo
> tot queritur cessare manus: non segnior ardet
>
> (*Theb.* 2.595-601)

Statius follows Virgil in portraying the hundred-handers fighting against the gods alongside the Titans.[334] Yet Statius exceeds Virgil in showing Briareus/Tydeus successfully mounting a challenge to *all* the gods (*stetit aethera contra... temnens | fulmina*, 2.596, 599-600 exceeds *Iovis...fulmina contra, Aen.* 10.567).[335] The phrase *lasso mutata Pyracmoni temnens | fulmina* (599-600) in the simile is fascinating. *Mutata* suggests a physical

[333] Pholus is the centaur who entertained Hercules and unlike his fellow centaurs could hold his wine, Apollodorus 2.5.4. Pholus is also the name of a centaur who runs away at Ovid *Met.* 12.306.
[334] *Aeneid* 10.565-70 differs from Hesiod's version, where the hundred-handers fight alongside the gods, *Theog.* 617-846, 713-25 and the Homeric version where Aegaeon protects Zeus from Poseidon and Athene, *Iliad* 1.402-6. The comparison of Aeneas to Aegaeon-Braireus is also disconcerting: see Hardie (1986) 154-6. Cf. also Hor. *Odes* 3.4.49-56; Ovid *Met.* 1.183-4; *Ach.* 1.484-90.
[335] Introducing the simile with *si fas est credere* is suggestive. Believing in the reality that the simile depicts may be *nefas* in some sense. See Mulder (1954) 310 on a scholiast on *Aeneid* 10.565 (fr. 14 Kinkel) who suggests an Antimachean origin for the comparison of Aeneas with Aegaeon-Briareus.

exchange of thunderbolts, as though Jupiter were having his thunderbolts hurled back at him; the verb also suggests both an exchange of positions, a literal reversal of the cosmic order even, and transformation of status and position between Briareus/Tydeus and his Jupiter-esque opponents.[336] Moreover, Jupiter's role in the combat described in the simile is almost elided; the king of the gods is referred to obliquely via his monstrous servant, the Cyclops Pyracmon, thus providing Jupiter with his own monstrous aspect. The phrase is densely packed with allusions, reversing cosmic orders, transforming Tydeus into a monstrous figure who *can* overthrow the gods and reduce Jupiter to a monster.

Tydeus' fight against fifty men broadens into an apparent challenge to the divine order of the epic universe.[337] Elsewhere, incorporation of gigantomachic imagery by Statius asserts this challenge further.[338] Tydeus' physical location, standing above his god-like enemies (2.555-8) portrays his inversion of epic norms. The giant stands above the gods. The centaur simile also shows Tydeus as a gigantic monster, hurling a huge rock (*saxum ingens*, 2.559) which becomes a mountain as it is hurled (*emissi turbine montis | obruitur*, 2.565-6).[339] The men he kills acquire godlike characteristics. Dorylas is described as *fulmineus* (2.571), an obvious double for Jupiter, and Theron as descendant of Mars (*Martisque e semine Theron*, 2.572) resembles the Mars for whom Tydeus' double Briareus has such contempt (2.598-9).

The themes of repetition, inversion and subversion, intertwined in the narration of Tydeus' *aristeia*, continue in the speech and death of Chromis (2.613-28).[340] His ancestry, birth and appearance are described before he makes a speech of encouragement to his fellow

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[336] *OLD* s.v. *muto* 1 'to give and receive, exchange', 2 'substitute', 3-14 'change, transform'. Shackleton Bailey's translation in the Loeb edition, 'thunderbolt after thunderbolt till Pyracmon grows weary', seems inadequate.

[337] Lovatt (2005) 23-54 sees a similar threat to divine order when Polynices becomes a figure of Phaethon in the chariot race.

[338] For a detailed analysis of gigantomachic imagery in the *Thebaid* with reference to Hippomedon and Capaneus, see Lovatt (2005) 114-39. In general on gigantomachy, see Mayer (1887); Vian (1952); Fontenrose (1957).

[339] See Hardie (1986) 100-2 on the common image of giants throwing mountains.

[340] His speech has already been discussed, see above, p.105.

Thebans and is killed as he finishes speaking, dying an especially horrific death by a spear *through his open mouth:*

> tunc audax iaculis et capti pelle leonis
> *pinea nodosae quassabat robora clavae*
> ...
> dum clamat, subit ore cavo Teumesia cornus,
> nec prohibent fauces; atque illi voce repleta
> intercepta natat prorupto in sanguine lingua.
> stabat adhuc, donec transmissa morte per artus
> labitur inmorsaque cadens obmutuit hasta.
>
> (*Theb.* 2.618-9, 624-8)

This short section of battle narrative repeats the influence of the battle between Perseus and Phineus in *Metamorphoses* 5. Chromis is also the name of one of the men who fight against Perseus.[341] In the *Metamorphoses,* Chromis beheads Emathion, a man who is too old for battle, but instead fights with his tongue (*loquendo | pugnat, Met.* 5.101-2). The old man's severed head memorably lands on the altar whilst still haranguing his enemies (*Met. 5.103-6). Statius' reworking of this incident is rich in irony. This time it is Chromis* who is killed rather than the killer, and where his Ovidian namesake had committed an obviously impious murder against a defenceless and ludicrously loquacious old man, the Statian Chromis suffers a threefold silencing in death as his voice is choked (*voce repleta,* it is literally 'filled' by the spear), his tongue is severed (*intercepta lingua*) and it swims in flowing blood (*natat prorupto in sanguine).*[342] Yet the Chromis also evokes more gigantomachic imagery through his appearance. He is bold (*audax*), wears a lion skin (*capti*

[341] On this name repetition, see Hulls (forthcoming).
[342] The images of a severed head still speaking and severed tongues are quite common in epic poetry. Cf. Dolon in Homer *Iliad* 10.454-7; Orpheus in Virgil *Georgics* 4.523-6 and Ovid *Metamorphoses* 11.50-3; Philomela at *Met.* 6.555-61. Cf. also Lucr. *DRN* 3.640-7; Virgil *Aen.* 10.395-6.

115pelle leonis) and fights with a huge club (*pinea nodosae quassabat robora clavae*) and is an obvious double for Hercules, who assisted the gods in the battles against the giants and Typhoeus, and whose epic exploits are often reminiscent of his role in the Gigantomachy.[343] Yet the giant-double Tydeus' killing of the Hercules-double Chromis enacts the loss of power of the traditional epic voice, cut in mid speech.

The gigantic power of Tydeus threatens to run out of control and rip the fabric of this epic apart until Pallas intervenes by speaking to Tydeus:

> ille etiam Thebas spoliis et sanguine plenus
> *isset et attonitis sese populoque ducique*
> ostentasset ovans, ni tu, Tritonia virgo,
> flagrantem multaque operis caligine plenum
> consilio dignata virum: 'sate gente superbi
> Oeneos, absentes cui dudum vincere Thebas
> adnuimus, iam pone modum nimiumque secundis
> parce deis: huic una fides optanda labori.
> fortuna satis usu abi.'
>
> (*Theb.* 2.682-9)

Hershkowitz has quite rightly read this passage as: 'an allegorical representation of the onset of reason ... Tydeus, who has been raging in his madness, comes to his senses.'[344] Pallas/reason manages to alter the pattern of action, madness, enervation, destruction that Hershkowitz identifies in the *Thebaid* by setting a limit to the extent of Tydeus' *virtus* (*pone*

[343] E.g. Hercules against Cacus, Virgil *Aen.* 8; Hercules against Antaeus, Lucan *BC* 4. See Hardie (1986) 110-8.

[344] Hershkowitz (1998a) 256: see also 256n.15 and Feeney (1991) 365-7. Tydeus' enervation also recalls the fighting of Turnus in *Aeneid* 9: see Hershkowitz (1998a) 253-5. Note that Turnus' enervation is explicitly caused by Juno's removing of her power, *Aen.* 9.800-6, whereas Tydeus becomes tired (*Theb.* 2.668-70) and has then to be restrained by Pallas. Turnus is himself endowed with a disconcerting, giant-like appearance, *Aen.* 7.783-8: see Hardie (1986) 118-9, and 143-56 on the complex strands of gigantomachic imagery in the last four books of the *Aeneid*.

modum).[345] It is the absence of limits to the number of his enemies that will ultimately prove destructive for Tydeus in book 8. However, Pallas also appears to be acting so as to restore the cosmic order within the poem, revealing in her speech that Tydeus may hold power even over the gods (*secundis | parce deis*). Pallas represents the voice of traditional, stable, divinely ordered epic that is under threat throughout Tydeus' stunning display of *virtus*.[346] Statius retains the Homeric precedent by having Tydeus spare Maeon.[347] Yet the Theban prophet becomes a substitute for Tydeus, taking his place by returning to Thebes, sacrificing himself there and saving Tydeus for his unlimited, fatal *aristeia* in Book 8.

Thus far our review of Tydeus' monomachy has revealed *virtus* as a spectacularly destructive force, not only in that it enables the warrior possessing it to kill far more opponents (and in far more gory a fashion) than would normally be possible, but also in that it destabilises the epic world itself. Statius uses a complex of intertextual references to earlier epic poetry, but is constantly inverting and subverting the texts to which he alludes. Tydeus imbued with *virtus* is constantly described by gigantomachic imagery, but in terms that reveal this double of the giants as *more powerful* than the gods themselves. The imagery is extra-rational and contrary to the accepted limits of epic poetry. Pallas' plea to Tydeus, *pone modum* (2.687), thus acquires a metapoetic force as a wish to remain within the normalised boundaries of poetry and quite literally within the bounds of reason. The next section will examine the use of gigantomachic imagery elsewhere in the description of Statius' heroes and in their displays of *virtus*.

The characteristics of *virtus* which Statius sets up in his description of Tydeus' monomachy are repeated in depictions of successive heroes in the battle narrative of the

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[345] The setting of limits is of course a programmatic element in the poem, cf. *Theb.* 1.16. Thus Pallas acts in the same way as Statius in her attempt to control the epic narrative. Furthermore, we might draw a parallel between Pallas' restraining of Tydeus with Statius' construction of a restrained version of Lucan's Scaeva.

[346] On the use of gigantomachic imagery to universalise conflict, especially civil war, see Hardie (1986) 103n.48.

[347] Maeon's suicide before Eteocles is normally read as a powerful display of *pietas* and a great example of resistance and escape from the constraints of tyranny, especially because of Statius' praise at 3.99-113. See Vessey (1973) 107-16; Dominik (1994) 85-7; McGuire (1997) 200-5; Ripoll (1998) 226-8, 382-7, 485-6.

second half of the *Thebaid*. The Argive heroes Tydeus (8.536-767), Hippomedon (9.86-569) and Capaneus (principally 10.827-939) all have large sections of the narrative devoted to them and their *aristeiai*, their grand displays of epic *virtus*. These are not the only exponents of *virtus* in Statius' poem, the exploits of the Theban heroes are only briefly described; other characters (Amphiaraus and Menoeceus, to whom we will come later) have great quantities of *virtus* but display it in different or more complex ways. The three Argives have a superfluity of *virtus* and, at first, use it to great destructive effect on the battlefield. The slaughter that they make is excessive, hyperbolic, extremely gory, and even comical.[348] Moreover, their *virtus* constantly seems to make them *impius*. Their *virtus* is also self-destructive and all three end up dying at the culmination of their *aristeiai*. *Virtus* is also a quality that isolates individuals both in life and in death. *Aristeiai* are achieved by one man on his own (or with the assistance of a deity). Tydeus' monomachy is achieved on his own, his *aristeia* in Book 8 leaves him isolated and surrounded. Hippomedon is ultimately surrounded by nameless individuals and slaughtered. Capaneus turns his back on mortal battles and embarks on a one-man assault on the heavens. All three heroes (and Menoeceus as well) are men who: 'feel disgust and impatience with the fragility of their mortal vessel.'[349] These are men who desire immortality, or perhaps want to be more than human. This latter desire is certainly something that all three go some way towards achieving. All three are characterised in terms which make them appear superhuman. Indeed, in providing these heroes with power, apparently without any of the normal moral restraints that inhibit human behaviour, the nature of *virtus* makes them seem like the gods.[350] Dense layers of imagery make these men into giants, terrifying wild beasts, and centaurs. More disturbing is the fact that Statius' heroes are more than giants – they are *successful* rivals to the gods. Their *virtus* makes them superhuman and able to challenge the divine order. Moreover,

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[348] The excessive nature of these *aristeiai* generally requires Statius to ask the Muses for excessive poetic inspiration: 7.628-31 (before the *aristeia* of Amphiaraus); 8.373-4 (before Tydeus' *aristeia*); 10.628-31 (before the suicide of Menoeceus); 10.829-31 (before the *aristeia* of Capaneus). Pallas also tells Tydeus that he should ask the gods for his account of his monomachy to be believed (*huic una fides optanda labori*, 2.689).

[349] Hardie (1993) 69.

[350] See Feeney (1991) *passim*. We could also compare with Virgil's Juno.

virtus leads towards individual acts that are exceptionally impious and morally wrong.[351] All three kill young and apparently innocent men; Tydeus kills Atys, Hippomedon kills Crenaeus, and Capaneus kills Eunaeus. These killings are portrayed as acts that are characterised by *nefas*. All three attack individuals favoured by the gods or their actions result in some sort of offence against the gods. Tydeus' monomachy results in the suicide of Apollo's priest Maeon and he then eats his killer's head as he dies (more on this passage in a moment). Hippomedon kills Creneaus, the grandson of the river-god Ismenos, who then attacks him. Capaneus repeatedly declares his atheism or contempt for the gods, kills Eunaeus, a priest of Bacchus, and finally attacks the gods and is struck down by Jupiter's thunderbolt. This self-destruction extends beyond merely resulting in death. It annihilates any sense of respect that the heroes may have created for themselves. Tydeus loses immortality by disgusting the gods with his cannibalism, Hippomedon fights off a god only to die an ignominious death as he crawls onto a river-bank, Capaneus, the atheist and self-styled *contemptor divum*, is killed by the king of the gods. Characters within the poem, both human and divine, and, one suspects, the audience outside the poem cannot or should not admire these heroes.

Tydeus' great display of *virtus* is not limited to the ambush in Book 2. He shows an even greater level of *virtus* in his fighting and death in Book 8. Tydeus' role in the latter part of Book 8 of the *Thebaid* closely mirrors his *aristeia* in Book 2. His clash with Haemon repeats themes seen in the earlier book (*Danaos Cadmeius Haemon | sternit agitque, furens sequitur Tyria agmina Tydeus; | Pallas huic praesens, illum Tirynthius implet.* 8.457-9). Tydeus again fights against a Herculean opponent and, following a discussion between Olympians, Hercules withdraws his strength from his favourite and allows Tydeus success.[352] As at the end of his previous *aristeia*, Tydeus is under the influence of Pallas rather than behaving like a giant. Following this non-confrontation with Haemon, Tydeus has a second *aristeia* that repeats but also exceeds the violence of the first (8.536-606, 663-

[351] See Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 198-203.
[352] See Hardie (1993) 37; Hershkowitz (1998a) 256-7.

715). Tydeus again skewers two bodies with one spear, Prothous and his horse (8.536-47, cf. *the Thespiadae, 2.629-43);*[353] *again he is compared to a lion in his madness (8.593-5, cf.* 2.275-81). He reminds his Theban opponents of his extraordinary feat of monomachy (*ille ego inexpletis solus qui caedibus hausi | quinquaginta animas* 8.666-7), again he wishes he had attacked Thebes when he had the chance, and again complains that there are too few opponents for him:

> totidem, totidem heia gregatim
> *ferte manus! nulline patres, nulline iacentum*
> unanimi fratres? quae tanta oblivio luctus?
> quam pudet Inachias contentum abiisse Mycenas!
> hine super Thebis? haec robora regis? ubi autem
> egregius dux ille mihi?
>
> (*Theb.* 8.667-72)

The oppositions of *unus/omnes* and *unus/nulli* again dominate Tydeus' boastful speech (cf. 2.620-3),[354] recreating the monomachy on a crowded battlefield. Yet as Tydeus' second *aristeia* progresses it becomes clear that this second repetition of Scaeva's single-handed fight will not be as successful as the first:

> et iam corporibus sese spoliisque cadentum
> *clauserat; unum acies circum consumitur, unum*
> omnia tela vovent: summis haec ossibus haerent,
> pars frustrata cadunt, partem Tritonia vellit,
> multa rigent clipeo. densis iam consitus hastis
> ferratum quatit umbo nemus, tergoque fatiscit

[353] *Both actions anticipating Hippomedon in Book 9, who will expressly replace Tydeus as centre of* attention: see below, p.122.
[354] See above, p.105. Cf. Hardie (1993) 7-8.

atque umeris gentilis aper; nusquam ardua coni
gloria, quique apicem torvae Gradivus habebat
cassidis, haut laetum domino ruit omen: inusta
temporibus nuda aera sedent, circumque sonori
vertice percusso volvuntur in arma molares.
iam cruor in galea, iam saucia proluit ater
pectora permixtus sudore et sanguine torrens.

(*Theb.* 8.700-12)[355]

The language of the one and the many now begins to work against Tydeus as he is surrounded by the Theban army and fights, not against men, but against their weapons (especially *unum | omnia tela vovent*, 8.701-2 with the emphatic gemination of *unum* at the line's end, immediately followed by the opposing *omnia*, the opposition further emphasised by the enjambment). Once again, Statius' important model is Lucan's Scaeva who is also surrounded (*conpressus et omni | vallatus bello*, *BC* 6.184-5), who is also the only object of the enemies' weapons (*illum omnia tela*, *BC* 6.189), whose armour is battered to pieces (*BC* 6.192-4), and whose bones are pierced by weapons (compare *in summis ossibus hastas*, *BC* 6.195 and *summis haec ossibus haerent*, *Theb.* 8.702). Tydeus' shield pierced by countless weapons is especially reminiscent of Scaeva; Tydeus' shield becomes a grove, so thickly is it planted (*densis iam consitus hastis | ferratum quatit umbo nemus*, *Theb.* 8.704-5, cf. *BC* 6.203-6). Yet unlike the *aristeiai* of Scaeva and of Tydeus in Book 2, the *virtus* Tydeus now displays has a differently destructive effect. As Hershkowitz comments:

> 'The numbers he faced in Book 2 were finite, but in Book 8 they are seemingly infinite: Tydeus keeps on killing but the Thebans keep on coming. The spears and gore of the fifty would-be assassins were a hindrance to Tydeus, but during the battle this kind of hindrance becomes fatal. The destruction he

[355] On this passage, see Feeney (1991) 360-1; Hardie (1993) 69; Hershkowitz (1998a) 258-9.

causes becomes, in effect, self-destructive as he is contained by the bodies and *spoils of the men he has slaughtered.*'[356]

Further evocation of Lucan's Scaeva is again marked by repetition of and deviation from the intertext. Tydeus' *aristeia* in Book 8 is much more closely modelled upon Scaeva's than was the monomachy of Book 2. Yet there is one obvious and crucial difference, Tydeus' great *virtus* now results in his own destruction, and it is more overwhelming than mere death. Tydeus is fatally wounded by Melanippus, whom he kills with a spear thrown with his last remaining strength (8.725-6). When Tydeus demands the head of his killer from his comrades, the full emotional effect of Tydeus' unrestrained display of *virtus* is revealed as a complete madness of joy and anger (*amens | laetitiaque iraque*, 8.751-2). As he dies, Tydeus turns cannibal and gnaws and the head of his opponent:

erigitur Tydeus vultuque occurit et amens
laetitiaque iraque, ut singultantia vidit
ora trahique oculos seseque agnovit in illo,
imperat abscisum porgi, laevaque receptum
spectat atrox hostile caput, gliscitque tepentis
lumina torva videns et adhuc dubitantia figi.
infelix contentus erat: plus exigit ultrix
Tisphone; iamque inflexo Tritonia patre
venerat et misero decus immortale ferebat,
atque illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri
aspicit et vivo scelerantem sanguine fauces
(nec comites auferre valent)

753 trahique *Hill* : trucesque *Håkanson, Shackleton Bailey*

(Theb. 8.751-62)

[356] Hershkowitz (1998a) 259.

Roman writers frequently make connections between the themes and imagery of severed heads, cannibalism and sadistic viewing of civil war and its bloodiest effects. [357] Moreover, the cannibalism of severed heads itself is not an entirely uncommon feature of civil war narratives; we might compare the accusation directed at Aquilius Regulus that he had gnawed at the head of Piso (Tac. *Hist.* 4.42, esp. *adpetitumque morsu Pisonis caput obiectaret*) or the example of Sulla, feasting his eyes on severed heads because it is *nefas* to do so with his mouth:

> id quoque inexplebilis feritatis indicium est: abscisa miserorum capita modo *non vultum ac spiritum retinentia in conspectum suum adferri voluit, ut oculis illa,* quia ore nefas erat, manderet.
>
> (Val. Max. 9.2.1)

Statius' depiction of Tydeus' cannibalism clearly activates many of the themes present in Valerius' account of Sulla.[358] In both instances the severed heads are still almost alive and in both passages gazing at the severed head provides great contentment. Both passages create extra horror in their audience through the picture of severed heads that are still alive, yet while Valerius is content to depict heads that still seem alive (*modo non vultum ac spiritum retinentia*), Statius goes one step further in depicting a severed head that still retains life (*gliscitque tepentis | lumina torva videns*). Furthermore, in Statius' account Tydeus very obviously crosses the boundaries into what can only be described as *nefas*.

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[357] Cf. also the theme of decapitation, displaying and looking at severed heads in civil war narratives. See Livy 3.5.9, *legatique caput ferociter ostentantes*; for Lucan on Pompey's head being examined by Caesar, see Mayer (1981) ad 8.632-5; Leigh (1997) 297 and n.8; Plutarch *Crassus* with Braund (1993); Plutarch *Antony* 20.3-4 with Pelling (1988) *ad loc*; on the pervasive theme of decapitation in Plutarch *Galba* and *Otho* and the display of Galba's impaled head, *Galba* 27.4, see Ash (1997) 197-200.

[358] We might want to see parallels in Statius' activation of the *exemplum* tradition in his account of Tydeus and the importance of the *exemplum* tradition in Lucan's Scaeva, who is himself such an important model of Tydeus: see Leigh (1997) 158-90. The example of Sulla as a sadistic viewer also appears at Sen. *Prov.* 3.7 and in Lucan, see Leigh (1997) 289-304.

Tydeus enacts at a literal level the cannibalism that, according to Valerius Maximus, Sulla could only consider and perform at a metaphorical level. Sulla gains the ultimate pleasure from his victory from gazing at the heads of his enemies, Tydeus is inspired by Tisiphone to consume his enemy's head.

Statius makes a series of reflexive comments at key moments in the narrative that illustrate Tydeus' embodiment of *virtus* and his descent into cannibalism through acts of *virtus*. These key phrases become increasingly compressed, reflecting the increasingly self-obsessed and self-destructive nature of Tydeus' *virtus*. After his defeat of the fifty, Tydeus wants to display his *virtus* (*sese populoque ducique* | *ostentasset* 2.683-4). Later in the battle against the Theban army, he self-destructively surrounds himself with the spoils of his *virtus* (*sese spoliisque cadentum* | *clauserat* 8.700-1). Finally, he recognises himself, his *virtus* as excellence on the battlefield, and his *virtus* as a self-destructive force (*seseque agnovit in illo* 8.753). So destructive is Tydeus that, in the end, he loses immortality and becomes a sinful, hellish, animal-figure: 'the fight within Tydeus between beast and god becomes a contest between Hell and Heaven: Tisiphone and Minerva contend for the soul of Tydeus (8.759).'[359] Tydeus had the opportunity to become a second Hercules, another mortal deified for his great deeds. Yet *virtus* in Statius' epic world has a supremely destructive effect that leaves Tydeus, like the giants he mimicked, spurned by the gods (8.763-5).

Tydeus' final action transforms metaphorical cannibalism into actual cannibalism. Yet the importance of the visual in this process, so obviously crucial for Valerius' Sulla who 'chews with his eyes', remains an important feature of Tydeus' cannibalism. Statius makes an especial effort to ensure that this horrific action is witnessed by as many as possible on the battlefield.[360] Indeed, the whole cosmos appears to be witnessing Tydeus' horrific deed as it happens. He finds his ultimate moment of self-recognition in viewing the head, his guardian goddess Pallas has to look away and bathe her eyes after witnessing the deed (8.762-6), his companions cannot stop his cannibalism (*nec comites auferre valent*). The

[359] Hardie (1993) 69. See also Feeney (1991) 360; Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 176-8.
[360] On the gaze in historiographical texts, see Davidson (1991); Walker (1993); Feldherr (1998); Ash (2006). For the moralising potential of the gaze in a range of texts, see Barton (2002).

opening of Book 9 reveals that Eteocles and the Thebans have also seen this act and that Mars himself is so horrified that he has to turn away (*nec comminus ipsum | ora sed et trepidos alio torsisse iugales*, 9.6-7).[361] The effect of civil war is encapsulated in this individual achievement and Tydeus displays the utterly destructive effects of *virtus*. He literalises the metaphor of civil war consuming the community that fights itself. Tydeus' moment of self-recognition as he gazes at his enemy collapses the difference between Melanippus and Tydeus; the two warriors become indistinguishable from one another, with the same gasping face and fierce eyes (*singultantia vidit | ora trahique oculos sese agnovit in illo*, 8.752-3). Tydeus becomes indistinguishable from the head he holds up and eats and thus the head becomes shockingly reminiscent of the *imagines* of Roman funerary ritual.[362] The wax *imagines* of ancestors that decorated homes, atria and public spaces were expressly designed to preserve the memory of the deceased.[363] The use of *imagines* in Roman funerals was still a live practice in the Flavian period; the funeral procession of Vespasian was marked by the appearance of the *archimimus* Favor wearing the emperor's mask and impersonating him (*sed et in funere Favor archimimus personam eius ferens imitansque, ut est mos, facta ac dicta uiui*, Suet. *Vesp.* 19.2). Tydeus' death throes becomes a perverted form of Roman funerary ritual; the head he eats becomes his own funereal *imago*. The memorial function of the Roman funeral mask becomes distorted, acting as a shocking advertisement of Tydeus' cannibalism. Such perversion of Roman ritual will become a recurrent feature in the deaths of Statius' heroes, especially (as we shall see in the following chapter) in the deaths of Menoeceus and Capaneus. It illustrates the collapse of society in the *Thebaid* into barbaric acts and tainted ritual. Tydeus, as he consumes his enemy's head, becomes the embodiment of the destructiveness of civil war. The head that he gazes upon

[361] This emphasis on witnesses almost seems like a perversion of Julius Caesar's reason for placing legates and a quaestor in charge of each of his legions: *uti eos testes suae quisque virtutis haberet* (Caes. *BG* 1.52.1).
[362] Cf. Polybius 6.53-4 for the fullest surviving description of a Roman funeral. On the use of *imagines* in funerals, cf. also Tac. *Ann.* 2.32; 3.5; 3.76; 4.9. See Toynbee (1971) 47-8, 56-8; Flower (1996); Gowing (2005) 13-15.
[363] See esp. Cic. 2 *Verr.* 5.36; cf. *pro Rab. Post.* 16; Sall. *Jug.* 4; Ulpian *Dig.* 11.7.2.6; Isid. *Orig.* 15.11.1.

reflects the destruction that he has wrought upon himself, a synecdoche that figures Tydeus as an entire society destroying itself in civil conflict. He takes the literal step from feasting his eyes on his victim, like another Sulla, to consuming the flesh of his enemy, actualising the monstrosity of civil war leaders in an act of cannibalism.

ii. Hippomedon, repetition and amplification.

The shattering effects of Tydeus' *virtus* spill over into the opening of Book 9 of the *Thebaid* as the news of his cannibalism moves through the human and divine worlds; those who have not seen will soon be told:

> asperat Aonios rabies audita cruenti
> Tydeos; ipsi etiam ingemuere iacentem
> Inachidae, culpantque virum et rupisse queruntur
> fas odii; quin te, divum implacidissime, quamquam
> praecipuum tunc caedis opus, Gradive, furebas
> offensum virtute ferunt, nec comminus ipsum
> ora sed et trepidos alio torsisse iugales.
>
> (*Theb.* 9.1-7)

The destructive nature of Tydeus' *virtus* could not be more different from the effects of Scaeva's. Where Caesarian comrades watch in amazement (*BC* 6.168-9) and even worship him as a living embodiment of *virtus* (*BC* 6.251-4), Tydeus enrages his opponents, upsets his comrades and even causes Mars to look away in horror. Dewar notes *offensum virtute* as an astonishing oxymoron: 'Mars would normally applaud a hero's blood-thirsty courage but here is shocked and offended by an excessive *virtus* which paradoxically turns a

vir into a *fera*.'[364] The sense of paradox is continued in Polynices' lament for his best friend. Tydeus' *virtus* both forbids and encourages him to believe the rumours of his death (*nimium nam cognita virtus | Oenidae credi letum suadetque vetatque*, 9.37-8). The paradoxical phrase clearly reveals that: 'Tydeus' prowess, well-known from such exploits as the Theban ambush, makes it impossible to believe that he is dead,'[365] but such is his prowess that he is clearly capable of getting himself into fatal situations. Moreover, the phrase illustrates the inherent paradox in *virtus*, a force that is so destructive as to make its user apparently invulnerable, but one which is by its nature self-destructive.

There follows the fight over Tydeus' corpse (9.86-195) where Hippomedon at first defends his body from the Thebans, but is then tricked into abandoning it by Tisiphone. The passage is inspired by Menelaus' defence of Patroclus' body (*Il.* 17) but is more succinct: 'Statius sensitively and intelligently adapts the episode to his own poetic purposes, using it to reintroduce a major character not seen since 7.430ff., showing him to be a true successor to Tydeus' *virtus*, and preparing us for the superhuman achievement of Hippomedon in his forthcoming fight with Ismenos.'[366]

Hippomedon is presented to us is giant-like terms,[367] and his status as 'reluctant giant' has recently been discussed in detail by Lovatt.[368] What follows is partly a summary of that discussion but also a re-orientation of Hippomedon's giant-like status in the light of our examination of Tydeus. Hippomedon's actions, and those of Capaneus after Hippomedon's death, act as further reiterations of Tydeus' *aristeiai* and amplifications of Tydeus' heroic actions and of his *virtus*. In other words, Statius pushes *virtus* to breaking point, providing increasing threats to the cosmic order of the epic universe until Capaneus' final assault on heaven itself.

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[364] Dewar (1991) 59.
[365] Dewar (1991) 65.
[366] Dewar (1991) 74. See Juhnke (1972) 132-7.
[367] A characteristic that Statius doubtless picks up from the Attic tragedians, e.g. Aes. *Sept.* 488, 489-90, 500; Eur. *Phoen.* 127-8. See Dewar (1991) 75-6; Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 190-7; Lovatt (2005) 119-20.
[368] See Lovatt (2005) 119-28. Dewar (1991) is also essential.

Hippomedon is unequivocally described as a giant. He is described as *arduus* (9.91), the epithet he is most often accorded in the *Thebaid* (4.129, 5.560, 6.654, only applied elsewhere to Atlas, 1.98, and Ismenos 9.418). When he appears on horseback in the catalogue of Argive warriors, he casts a gargantuan shadow (*umbraque inmane volanti* 4.137), making him seem like a centaur (4.140-4).[369] His discus throw in the games is likened to Polyphemus throwing rocks (*quale vaporifera saxum Polyphemus ab Aetna | lucis egente manu tamen in vestigia puppis* 6.716-7) and, more ominously, to the giants assaulting Olympus:

> [sic et Aloidae, cum iam calcaret Olympum
> *desuper Ossa rigens, ipsum glaciale ferebant*
> Pelion et trepido sperabant iungere caelo.]
>
> (*Theb.* 6.719-21)[370]

Moreover, the description of Hippomedon in a simile in Book 9 as a rock standing against a mass of water (9.91-4) not only anticipates his fight against the river Ismenos, but also intertextually recalls Virgil's Mezentius (*Aen.* 10.693-6) compared to a rock,[371] another hero compared to a giant (*Aen.* 10.763-8).[372] Later on in Book 9, Statius clearly actualises what is implicit in the name Hippomedon by making him into a half man, half horse figure. Moreover, the identification between Hippomedon and horse is emphasised when the horse is wounded by a spear (9.284-6). Hippomedon reacts as though he is injured as well as the horse (*haud tamen est turbatus fulmine ductor*, 9.286; *magnoque ex vulnere telum | exuit ipse gemens* 9.287-8). He acts as a double for a centaur.

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[369] Statius foreshadows Hippomedon's battle with Ismenos at 4.130-44, 7.425-44. See Kytzler (1969) 228. On *immanitas* see Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 192. Cf. Hardie (1986) 117.

[370] These lines only occur in a few, later MSS and are probably spurious, see Hill (1983) and Lovatt (2005) 112 on 6.719-21. Yet they are an appropriate description of Hippomedon; gigantomachy becomes an apt conclusion to the discus throw and links this action to Capaneus' assault on the walls of Thebes. On the discus competition in general, see Lovatt (2005) 101-13.

[371] See Klinnert (1970) 100-2; von Moisy (1971) 62-5; Tanner (1986) 3030; Caiani (1990) 262; Dewar (1991) 76; Lovatt (2005) 119-20.

[372] On Mezentius, see Lee (1979) 88-93; la Penna (1980); Gotoff (1984); Harrison (1991) *ad loc.*

The first half of Book 9 is taken up with Hippomedon's *aristeiai* and his eventual death.[373] Tydeus' actions had demonstrated the link between *virtus*, gigantomachic imagery, and self-destruction; Hippomedon continues these associations and presents his *virtus* as indistinguishable from acts apparently contrary to *pietas*. Hippomedon's first action is to attempt to defend Tydeus' corpse, an act which brings him into direct confrontation with Eteocles (9.86-195). The Theban king's taunting speech reveals the complex and perverted nature of Tydeus' *virtus*:

> 'non pudet hos manes, haec infamantia bellum
> *funera dis coram et caelo* ***inspectante*** *tueri?*
> scilicet *egregius sudor memorandaque virtus*
> hanc tumulare feram, ne non maerentibus Argos
> exequiis lacrimandus eat mollique feretro
> infandam eiectans saniem! dimittite curam.
> nullae illum volucres, nulla impia monstra nec ipse,
> si demus, pius ignis edat.'
>
> (*Theb.* 9.96-103)

Eteocles' speech echoes his encouragement to his men earlier in the book (9.12-24). Eteocles also distorts Tydeus' last words (*non ossa precor referantur ut Argos | Aetolumve larem; nec enim mihi cura supremi | funeris* 8.736-8), and emphasises Tydeus' bestial (*feram*) and impious nature (*infandam*). Dewar comments: 'Tydeus had meant that burial was unimportant to him compared to his *virtus*: Eteocles asserts that no burial is necessary because no wild animals will touch his defiled flesh.'[374] The opening of Book 9 reflects the visual element at the end of Book 8; gods and the heavens are called upon as *witnesses* of Tydeus' *nefas*. The whole universe has *seen* this crime. Yet Eteocles' speech is tinged with

[373] See Vessey (1973) 294-9; Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*
[374] Dewar (1991) 77.

irony as it unwittingly recalls the fate of the corpse of Maeon, the sole survivor of the fifty who ambushed Tydeus, for whom Eteocles forbade burial and whose body remained untouched by birds and wild animals:

> sed ducis infandi rabidae non hactenus irae
> stare queunt; vetat igne rapi, pacemque sepulcri
> impius ignaris nequiquam manibus arcet.
> ...
> durant habitus et membra cruentis
> inviolata feris, nudoque sub axe iacentem
> et nemus et tristis volucrum reverentia servat.
>
> (*Theb.* 3.96-8, 111-3)

Eteocles' speech thus constructs unlikely parallels between the two survivors of the fifty-man ambush. We are reminded of Maeon's role as a virtual sacrificial substitute for Tydeus in Book 3. More interesting for present line of investigation is Eteocles' sarcastic gibe *egregius sudor memorandaque virtus* (9.98). The unusual use of *sudor* creates a striking image of Hippomedon's *virtus* being used in a low, sweaty effort, and, coupled with *egregius*, creates a powerful paradox.[375] Tydeus, like his model Scaeva, is a powerful exponent of *virtus* and *nefas* simultaneously. Moreover, Hippomedon replaces Tydeus as the prime exponent of this morally dubious *virtus*. Hippomedon's careful movements and unwillingness to expose Tydeus' body mimic the careful defensive movements of Tydeus in his monomachy (2.580-94), while the manner by which he kills Eryx clearly recalls Tydeus' killing of Chromis (*faucibus ille cavis hastam non ore receptam | miratus moriens, pariterque et murmure plenus | sanguis et expulsi salierunt cuspide dentes* 9.130-2).

[375] *Sudor* is not used in this sense in Virgil, Ovid or Lucan but cf. Val. Fl. *Argo.* 5.668. The use of *sudor* in the *Thebaid* is interesting. It is twice used of the recovery of bodies from the battlefield (those of Atys, 8.637, and Menoeceus, 10.783), the horse race (6.296), and motherhood (5.124). More tellingly, Tydeus uses it to describe his efforts against the fifty (*ubi maximus illi | sudor* 3.403-4). Cf. the use of *sudare* 8.510, 9.626, 833, 10.526.

Hippomedon identifies himself as a double of Tydeus as his own replaying of the dead hero's *aristeiai* reaches its climax (*hanc tibi Tydeus,* | *Tydeus ipse rapit* 9.137-8; cf. *Aen.* 12.948-9).

Hippomedon's response to being tricked into abandoning Tydeus' corpse (9.144-76), which is then mutilated by the Thebans (9.177-95), is to embark on a long and incredibly destructive *aristeia* (9.196-569) which culminates in a battle with the river god Ismenos and Hippomedon's death. The Argive hero is constantly portrayed in terms that evoke images of centaurs and giants. His *aristeia* is an astonishing display of *virtus* that spills over into *furor* and *nefas* and will ultimately prove self-destructive. Hippomedon's combination of anger and *virtus* blinds him (*it tamen et caecum rotat inrevocabilis ensem,* | *vix socios hostesque, nihil dum tardet euntem,* | *secernens*, 9.198-200). He literally becomes blind to the difference between friend and foe, but also blind in a moral sense; *inrevocabilis* neatly captures the sense that Hippomedon's actions will have dire consequences (especially anticipating his killing of Ismenos' grandson Crenaeus (9.315-403)). As he leaps onto the back of Tydeus' horse (9.205-18), he speaks to it and seems to be able to communicate with it (*audisse accensumque putes*, 9.218), and is explicitly described in a simile as resembling a centaur (*semifer aeria talis Centaurus ab Ossa* | *desilit in valles*, 9.220-1). Hero and horse merge, and *semifer* emphasises the bestial nature of Hippomedon.[376] The fighting descends into the river Ismenos (9.259-83) and is as gory and horrific as anything seen in the *aristeiai* of Tydeus. Several warriors on both sides, Hypseus and Hippomedon in particular, enjoy conspicuous success through ultra-violent slaughter.[377] Intertextual play again informs Statius' epic narrative at this point. He again has a Lucanian model in mind, the sea-battle at

[376] Cf. also the simile comparing him to a dolphin terrifying smaller fish, 9.242-7.

[377] Hypseus is a Theban hero who in his brief appearance acts as a Theban double for Hippomedon. As well as glimpses of his own *aristeia*, he contributes to the killing of Hippomedon and then commits a self-destructive act by raising the Argive hero's helmet and shouting about his death (9.540-6). Capaneus kills him with an extraordinary spear-throw (9.546-54). The simile used to describe Hypseus' fall also uses gigantic imagery (*ruit haud alio quam celsa fragore* | *turris, ubi innumeros penitus quassata per ictus* | *labitur effractamque aperit victoribus urbem*, 9.554-6) not dissimilar to the falling tree simile that describes Hippomedon's death (9.532-9). The two warriors are described as equals by the narrator (*hic ferus Hippomedon, illic non segnior Hypseus* | *fletur, et alterni praebent solacia luctus*, 9.568-9).

Massilia (*BC* 3.509-762), but in particular seeks to 'outdo' the version of the river-battle depicted by Silius (*Pun.* 4.573-703).[378] One incident reveals Hippomedon's *aristeia* as a 'mirror image' of Tydeus' exploits. Hippomedon kills one of twin brothers, the Thespiadae, whose second brother begs to be killed as well (9.292-301). Hippomedon has repeated the action of Tydeus who killed another set of Thespiadae in his battle against the fifty (2.629-43, 3.14).[379] These are a different set of brothers, but Statius enacts this repetition of events to illustrate the *pietas* of both sets of twins and the connection between *virtus* and *nefas* in both *aristeiai*. Hippomedon shows particular glee in denying his opponents burial by slaughtering them in the river. His morally dubious position is picked up by *acerbat* (9.302) and *furit* (9.303).[380] Again we see Hippomedon not only repeating the actions of Tydeus, the warrior whom he has replaced as the focus of our attention, but his employment of corrupted *virtus* is even greater than that of his dead comrade.

Hippomedon's impious slaughter culminates with the death of Ismenos' grandson, Crenaeus (9.315-50). The Argive hero's *aristeia* has thus far been morally dubious and here he crosses over into full-blown impiety. Crenaeus warns Hippomedon that he is violating a sacred river (*sacrum amnem, sacrum*, 9.342) and when Hippomedon kills the young man, the river and surrounding woods shudder at his impious act (*horruit unda nefas, silvae flevistis utraeque, | et graviora cavae sonuerunt murmura ripae*, 9.347-8, recalling the empathising landscapes of Senecan tragedy). The killing of Crenaeus, the *insons puer* (9.443), further emphasises the image of Hippomedon as a double for Tydeus, who killed the equally young, beautiful and vulnerable Atys (8.554-654). We should also compare Capaneus killing Eunaeus (7.649-87), a priest of Bacchus but also a *puer* (7.684), and Dryas killing Parthenopaeus (9.570-907, esp. 841-76), also called *insons puer* by Diana (9.666). We are encouraged to feel horror and disgust at Hippomedon's act, but, in reality, Crenaeus'

[378] Both Flavian poets derive inspiration from *Iliad* 21.1-382. For a comprehensive analysis of all allusions and correspondences between the three texts, see Juhnke (1972) 13-43, 137-8, 201-2; Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*

[379] See Hulls (forthcoming).

[380] On the immorality of Hippomedon's actions and the link with *furor* see Vessey (1973) 295-6; Hershkowitz (1998a) 247-301 for models of madness in the *Thebaid* generally.

challenge to a far superior warrior is every bit as self-destructive as Hippomedon's actions. His challenge seems foolish and overconfident (9.340-3, cf. Eunaeus challenge 7.666-8) and unlike Capaneus (7.677-9), Tydeus (8.588-91) and Hippomedon when he spares Panemus (9.294-5), Hippomedon makes no gloating response (*nihil ille* 9.343). Dewar feels that Crenaeus' ability to walk on water (*transit avum, levat unda gradus, seu defluus ille, | sive obliquus eat*, 9.325-6) should have alerted Hippomedon to the divine favour the young man enjoyed, and that Hippomedon's *furor* blinded him to this as well, so leaving him in ignorance as to why Ismenos attacked him at all.[381] Hippomedon's slaughter of Creneaus is also a mirror-image of Dryas' killing of Parthenopaeus later in Book 9. The moral implications are the same for both killers; they have acted against *pietas* and angered the gods. Dewar's comment on Dryas could apply equally well to Hippomedon: 'he is a terrifying giant who, without giving warning, brutally cuts down a mere boy. This is no fair fight, but rather nothing short of murder.'[382] Dewar's reaction to the killing of a young boy is understandable, but misses some of the subtlety of Statius' presentation.

In her recent study, Lovatt has demonstrated that our appreciation of Hippomedon's actions is filtered through the focalisation of different characters within the narrative.[383] Hippomedon is presented as a brutal, monstrous hero by Crenaeus' mother, her friend and the river Ismenos. Crenaeus' mother presents Hippomedon as an arrogant and jubilant murderer:

> ecce furit iactatque tuo se in gurgite maior
> *Hippomedon, illum ripaeque undaeque tremescunt,*
> illius impulsu nostrum bibit unda cruorem.
>
> (*Theb.* 9.393-5)

[381] See Dewar (1991) on 315-50.
[382] Dewar (1991) 212.
[383] Lovatt (2005) 120-3.

Yet Hippomedon did not seek out Crenaeus (who himself rejoiced in the fight, *gaudebat*, 9.319) nor did he boast over the dead boy (*nihil ille*, 9.343). Crenaeus is unjustifiably confident (*tunc audax pariter telis et voca proterva*, 9.339) and himself taunts Hippomedon (*non haec fecunda veneno | Lerna, nec Herculeis haustae serpentibus*, 9.340-1). The narratorial voice refers to Hippomedon's battle with the river as a Herculean labour (*labor*, 9.316), the role which Crenaeus expressly denies him. Instead it is the river god Ismenos who plays the giant, in a role-reversal familiar from Tydeus' exploits. The river attacks Hippomedon with the trunk of an oak tree, in the manner of a giant (9.483-5).[384] Moreover, Statius describes the river with the language of boasting, madness and swelling (*furentibus*, 446; *tumidi*, 459; *iactat*, 462; *ovans*, 488), which in metaliterary terms is suggestive of the Callimachean association between swollen rivers and swollen epic song.[385] Hippomedon is overcome by the power of epic song itself, but his remarkable resistence to the river's attack is indicative of another repetition of Tydeus' actions. Hippomedon, like Tydeus following his monomachy, threatens to overturn the established norms and boundaries of traditional epic.

Following his daughter's complaint, the river-god Ismenos comes out to attack Hippomedon (9.446-69). But Hippomedon's response to the divine assault is remarkable:

> stat pugna impar amnisque virique,
> indignante deo; nec enim dat terga nec ullis
> frangitur ille minis, venientesque obvius undas
> intrat et obiecta dispellit flumina parma.
> stat terra fugiente gradus
>
> (*Theb.* 9.469-73)

[384] Lovatt (2005) 124.
[385] Brown (1994) 19-20.

As we have mentioned, the battle between hero and river-god is clearly modelled upon the battle between Achilles and Scamander in *Iliad* 21, and is also a reaction to the battle between Scipio and Trebia in Silius' *Punica* 4. Statius' depiction of the river-battle contains one significant feature which separates his version from his Homeric and Silian models.[386] Hippomedon shows superiority to both Homer's Achilles and Silius' Scipio in being able to stand up to Ismenos. Achilles' battle with Scamander is completely one-sided (*Il.* 21.264). He is driven back (*Il.* 21.241), cannot hold his footing (*Il.* 21.269-71 cf. Sil. *Pun.* 4.665-6; Stat. *Ach.* 2.143-9), and flees in terror (Hom. *Il.* 21.248). Scipio is at least spared some ignominy by never having to face Trebia directly. Instead he calls on the gods immediately for aid (*Pun.* 4.670-5) before the river-god can attack him. Statius outdoes his literary rivals by depicting a hero who can stand up to the river-god. Hippomedon becomes a man-mountain in the face of an unequal battle, a common motif in single combat narrative in historiography (*stat pugna impar* 9.469 recalls *Il.* 21.264 but *stare* is in strong contrast to Achilles' retreat)[387] and advances into the waves showing great surefootedness (9.470-2). He even taunts the god (9.476-80). Dewar's simple comment is revealing: 'his *virtus* is superhuman.'[388] Hippomedon is a second Tydeus, a giant who *can* fight the gods (after Hippomedon's death, Hypseus calls him *debellatorque cruenti | gurgitis*, 9.545-6), but in a typical paradox, Statius reverses human and divine roles so that river comes to resemble giant. Hippomedon's battle with the river takes Tydeus' potential for fighting the gods one stage further, amplifying it until a genuine challenge to the order of the cosmos becomes apparent. Hippomedon does not become an active force against the divine, but, as Lovatt notes, he is: 'a solid force for stability, standing against the overwhelming destructiveness of

[386] Following Wistrand (1956) 58-9; Juhnke (1972) 12; Dewar (1991) xxxi in placing the composition of *Punica* 4 (c.84 AD) before that of *Thebaid* 9 (c. 88 AD). For several changes in detail and in the order of events, see Juhnke (1972) 37-41. On the battle between Ismenos and Hippomedon generally see Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*; Lovatt (2005) 123-8.

[387] On single combat in historiography see Oakley (1998) 113-48 on the single combat between Manlius and the Gaul at Livy 7.9.6-10.14; (1998) 230-51 on the duel of Valerius Corvus at Livy 7.25.3-26.15; (2005) 216-17 on Livy 9.17.12. On the inequality of combatants see above, esp. p. 124. As the *smaller* of the two combatants, one almost expects Hippomedon to win, reflecting another facet of corrupted *virtus* in Statius. For bibliography on single combat, see Oakley (1998) 125.

[388] Dewar (1991) 144.

the natural and the divine. By sheer sleight of hand, the river god has become the giant *attacking the order of the cosmos.*'[389]

Like Tydeus, Hippomedon's *virtus* is ultimately self-destructive, and despite Juno's intervention and his quasi-gigantic status, he is exhausted by the river and killed by Thebans as he emerges onto the riverbank (9.492-525). *Virtus*' power to oppose individuals against the masses is again made clear. Hippomedon is murdered not by any named individual but by a 'Theban host' (*Phoenissa cohors* 9.527) who do not engage him hand-to-hand but pelt him with a shower of weapons (*nimbo | telorum* 9.526-7). He dies ingloriously, isolated and alone. Yet even in death, Hippomedon's awesome, superhuman, giant-like appearance remains:

> procumbit, Getico qualis procumbit in Haemo
> *seu Boreae furiis putri seu robore quercus*
> caelo mixta comas, ingentemque aera laxat:
> illam nutantem nemus et mons ipse tremescit
> qua tellure cadat, quas obruit ordine silvas.
> non tamen aut ensem galeamve audacia cuiquam
> tangere; vix credunt oculis ingentiaque horrent
> funera et astrictis accedunt comminus armis.
>
> (*Theb.* 9.532-9)

The tree in the simile is gigantic, so big that its foliage mixes with the heavens (*caelo mixta comas*) and leaves a huge space when it falls (*ingentem aera*). The awe with which the Thebans hold his corpse gives him a monstrous air, recalling the reaction to the deaths of other monsters such as Cacus (*Aen.* 8.265-7), the Calydonian boar (Ovid *Met.* 8.423-4), and Apollo's Python (*Theb.* 1.619-20). The tree simile and gemination of *procumbit* imitates Virgil *Aen.* 5.448-9 (*concidit, ut quondam cava concidit aut Erymantho |*

[389] Lovatt (2005) 128.

aut Ida in magna radicibus eruta pinus), but the context of the boxing match (another contest and display of *virtus*) is transformed into Hippomedon's death. The imitation illustrates Statius' radical transformation of the Virgilian concept of virtus.[390]

The depiction of Hippomedon as centaur/giant is disturbing not simply because he seems unnaturally superhuman but also because of the possible comparison between Argive hero and Domitian's equestrian statue described in *Silvae* 1.1. The description of Domitian's statue as a *moles* hinted at the possibility that it might collapse under its own immense weight. Such a potential is actualised in the figure of Hippomedon, much as the potential for cannibalism is actualised in the final actions of Tydeus. In the simile, Hippomedon dies not from the wounds inflicted from an external source (one almost expects men wielding axes), but as an oak tree blown over by the North wind or collapsing because it is rotten. The simile suggests not a violent death, but a natural process and the latter possibility surprisingly likens Hippomedon in his dying moments to Lucan's Pompey; one gets the impression that something this big simply *had* to fall. Hippomedon acts as a synecdoche for the state fighting itself in civil war and collapsing under its own weight.[391] Size matters, and for Hippomedon, Tydeus, and the civil war they represent, excessive size results in self-destruction.

3. Conclusions.

Both Tydeus and Hippomedon display gigantic quantities of *virtus*, and, as we shall see, both Capaneus and Menoeceus share in Statius' depiction of heroic *virtus*. Yet the virtue so crucial to the construction of positive heroes in Virgil's *Aeneid* has become disturbingly debased. *Virtus* is a quality that allows Statius' heroes to perform unnaturally great deeds,

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[390] See Wills (1996) 348-9.

[391] Such imagery of collapse is common in classical presentation of civil war and is a commonplace of Greek political thought, cf. Solon fr. 4W. In Roman literature, cf. Livy 1 *praef.* 4 *[Roma] iam magnitudine laboret sua*; Livy 30.44.8 *nulla magna civitas diu quiescere potest; si foris hostem non habet, domi invenit, ut praevalida corpora ab externis causis tuta videntur, suis ipsa viribus onerantur*; Horace *Epodes* 7.9-10; 16.2 *ipsa Roma viribus ruit* with Mankin (1995) *ad loc.* and Watson (2003) *ad loc.*; Florus 1.47.6. See Dutoit (1936).

and it is this supernatural power that both Tydeus and Hippomedon fail to control. Ultimately, superhuman displays of *virtus* threaten to unseat the natural cosmic order and the mortal heroes collapse under its weight. The metaphor is chosen deliberately to evoke the Callimachean, metapoetic imagery of the weight of epic.[392] Both Tydeus and Hippomedon threaten heroic in a generic sense; gigantomachy is the subject *par excellence* of heroic, martial epic and both men threaten to overturn the normal rules and expectations of that genre. Yet their challenge is ultimately a futile one; both die ignominious deaths, overcome by their own weight of *virtus*.

Both come into conflict with the cosmos in a very direct sense, Tydeus resisting the urge to fight single-handedly against Thebes in Book 2 only through the agency of his patron goddess Pallas (herself very close to a personification of reason) and his fight against the seemingly limitless opposition from Thebes is only delayed until Book 8 when he is finally overwhelmed both by his opponents and by his own superfluity of *virtus*. The cannibalism that marks his death offends not only his comrades and his enemies but even the gods themselves, Pallas finally turning away from her favourite as Tisiphone drives him to a final mad act (we might again see Pallas and Tisiphone as allegories of reason and *furor*). Hippomedon comes into more direct conflict with the river Ismenus following his killing of the river's youthful grandson. Like Tydeus, Hippomedon exhibits a monstrous, giant-like quality which leads him to astonishing deeds but also ultimately an ignominious death. Both heroes fulfil a further role within Statius' conception of civil war. Both portray the essential, self-destructive nature of civil conflict; both are living embodiments of general features of civil war. Tydeus' cannibalism comes to represent the self-consuming nature of civil conflict while the super-size Hippomedon resembles the bloated state that collapses in upon itself due to its own size. These heroes are allegories themselves, at least to some extent.

Statian *virtus* seems significantly different from *virtus* in the other Flavian epicists. He accords a much greater value to this quality within the poem than Valerius does in the *Argonautica*, making a more prominent and more central feature of the *Thebaid*. Unlike in

[392] For a similar reading of the poetics of Capaneus, see Lovatt (2005) 136-8.

Silius' *Punica*, *virtus* in the *Thebaid* is constantly and consistently debased, self-destructive and corrupted. In the figure of Silius' Scipio, we can see a figure who displays the proper and admirable *Romana virtus* that the Roman aristocracy (and doubtless Silius himself) looked back to with such fondness. Key to these differences is the context of civil conflict. Whatever the realities of the situation, Statius presents *all* conflicts in the *Thebaid* as civil in some sense. Yet unlike Lucan's *Bellum Civile* the plot of the *Thebaid* involves conflicts that are civil only by association with the central theme of *fraternae acies* (e.g. Antigone and Argia competing to bury Polynices, Tydeus and Polynices wrestling, Argos attacking Thebes). This subtle difference is crucial. Statius constructs a concept of *virtus* with a strong sense of exemplarity. The allegory of empire that is represented in Tydeus and Hippomedon extends to include Domitianic Rome. Their spectacular, memorable and ultimately futile deaths mimic the *ambitiosae mortes* that Tacitus criticises so heartily in the *Agricola*. *Virtus* is something that must be abandoned, consigned to a bygone age, because it will destroy those who seek it.

CHAPTER 3

THE EFFECTS OF VIRTUES: RELIGION, SACRIFICE AND *PIETAS*

Thus far, we have concentrated mainly on the effects of *virtus* upon the protagonists of the *Thebaid*. However, now we have set up some expectations of the effects of *virtus*, we should compare this with the effects of the related concept, *pietas*.[393] Pollmann reads 'anti-piety', a quality displayed by Oedipus and his sons, as a central theme of the *Thebaid* created in contrast to the Virgilian concept of *pietas*.[394] The idea of Aeneas and *Aeneid* as paradigmatic of good Roman values in the brave new Augustan world is one against which Ovid and Lucan both set their own epic poetry.[395] Yet Statius' own oppositional construction is not nearly as tidy as Pollmann's positive-negative opposition suggests. The effect of *pietas* on those who display it calls its own value into question. Indeed, Statius blurs the distinction between the apparently polar opposition that Pollmann constructs between *pietas* and 'anti-piety' in Book 10. *Pietas* itself has self-destructive potential in the Statian conception and the singular opposition between 'good, Virgilian *pietas*' and 'bad, Statian anti-*pietas*' slowly collapses. Moreover, *pietas* is not a quality that seems to have much relevance in the conclusion of Statius' epic. As with *virtus*, there is a suggestion that *pietas* is a quality out of place in the world of the *Thebaid*.

Such a conclusion makes for a striking contrast between the world of the *Thebaid* and the contemporary Roman world under Domitian. The emperor seems to have had a

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[393] *OLD* s.v. *pietas* 1 'an attitude of dutiful respect towards those to whom one is bound by ties of religion, consanguinity', 2 'the attitude of man towards the gods, of the reciprocal feeling of gods towards human beings', 3 'of relationships between human beings [esp. parents and children]', 4 'of citizens towards a state or ruler'.

[394] Pollmann (2001) 15-16. On *pietas* in general, see Hellegouarc'h (1963) 276-9; Weinstock (1971) 248-59; Wagenvoort (1980) 1-20. Other important studies of *pietas* in the *Thebaid* include Burgess (1972); Ripoll (1998) 256-312; Delarue (2000) 80-3, 106-11, 356-62.

[395] The issue of exemplarity is a complex one. Aeneas is clearly intended to be an exemplary hero in some sense at *Aen.* 12.435-40, *disce, puer, virtutem ex me...et te animo repetentem exempla tuorum | et pater Aeneas et avunculus excitet Hector.* Augustus clearly viewed Aeneas as a model for his own image and placed images of Aeneas in his forum: see Suet. *Aug.* 31.5; 89.2; cf. Ovid *Fasti* 5.563-4; Wistrand (1984). That Aeneas displays virtues that Augustus held especially dear (cf. Aug. *RG* 34.2 on *virtus, clementia, iustitia, pietas* with Binder (1971) 278-9; see Wallace-Hadrill (1981)) is harder to maintain: see Cairns (1989) esp. 18-37; Horsfall (1990); (1995) 166-7; Conte (1991); Powell (1992a). Leigh (1997) 158-90 discusses the exemplary value of Lucan's Scaeva and his *virtus*: see above p.103. Both *virtus* and *pietas* in the *Thebaid* have exemplary potential.

genuine concern for religious and moral life in the empire and saw himself as another *Augustus in this field.*[396] *The emperor himself appears to have had strong personal religious* feeling, and, like his father and brother before him, recognised that he owed his position to the legions and sought to legitimate his regime with increased emphasis on divine sanction in imperial ideology.[397] Jupiter regularly appeared in Flavian propaganda, and Martial, Statius and Silius and Domitianic coinage all identify Domitian with Jupiter.[398] We have *already mentioned Domitian's rebuilding of the Capitoline temple, and he also built shrines* to Jupiter Conservator and Jupiter Custos. On the model of the Olympic games, Domitian instituted the *agon Capitolinus*, celebrated every four years. Domitian presided over the games himself, and Suetonius reports that he would wear purple robes and a gold crown depicting Juno, Jupiter and Minerva. By setting up the *ludi Capitolini*, Domitian associated Jupiter publicly with his regime: 'the public celebration of the Capitoline festival was a dramatic statement of the central role of Jupiter in imperial ideology and of his profound association with the emperor.'[399] Equally significant is Domitian's reorganisation of the *sodales Flaviales* so that the cult activities were transferred to Jupiter as protector of Domitian. The religious ideology of Domitian's regime even affected the military sphere. Domitian's defeat of the Chatti was presented as victory in a *bellum Iovis*, especially in coinage commemorating the event, while his triumphal arch at Cumae depicts Domitian as a thunderbolt wielding Jupiter, at the traditional location of the latter's battle against the *Giants.*[400] *The ideology of Domitian as Jupiter's vicegerent on earth was extremely* common.[401] Occasionally, poets went so far as to term Domitian as *Jupiter Noster* and

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[396] See Jones (1992) 99, Cf. Aug. *RG* 6.1. On *pietas* in Titus' relationship with Domitian, see Griffin (2000a) 53-4.

[397] I avoid using terms such as 'belief' and 'piety' due to their connotations of faith based religions such as Christianity. See Price (1984) 10-15; Beard & Crawford (1985) 26-7; Phillips (1986) 2697-711. *On the complexities of belief in Roman religion, see Feeney (1998) 12-46. For a general* overview of religion under Domitian, see Jones (1992) 99-109.

[398] Sauter (1934) 54-78; Liebeschuetz (1979) 173-4; Fears (1981a) 78-80.

[399] Fears (1981a) 78. On the Capitoline games, see Jones (1996) ad Suet. *Dom.* 4.4. Momigliano (1935) 165-71; Fears (1981a) 78 and n.384a; Jones (1992) 99-100.

[400] *On the Chatti, see Fears (1981a) 79 and n.388 for the coins. On the arch at Cumae, see Fears* (1975a) 8.

[401] See e.g. Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.79-81; 4.3.128-9; Quint. 10.1.91.

Tonans.[402] There was thus a strong ideological connection made between Jupiter and Domitian. Moreover, this is an ideological connection which affected religious practice in Rome.

Domitian was also well known for his devotion to Minerva, an affiliation which borders on the fanatical in less complimentary authors, and the goddess appeared regularly on his coinage.[403] Domitian also set up the Alban *Quinquatria* festival for Minerva at which Statius competed successfully (cf. *ludi saeculares*).[404] Domitian also held a strong interest in the cult of Isis, which he shared with his father and brother and which may have been strengthened in AD 69 when he escaped the Vitellians in Rome by disguising himself as an Isiac worshipper.[405] Domitian's strong sense of morality is emphasised by his attention to the Vestals; he instigated several prosecutions of Vestals for *incesta* and his focus upon the *minutiae* of religious law led to some brutal punishments for the guilty.[406] Domitian's willingness to be the arbiter of public morality is reflected in his appointment as censor for life. The appointment was an undisguised piece of autocracy and this is reflected both in the contemporary and subsequent literary record.[407] Finally, Domitian's title *dominus et deus*, whether obligatory or not, reflects the control freakery of an emperor who was something of a moral crusader.[408] Therefore we can see an atmosphere in Rome where Domitian was

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[402] Mart. 4.8.12; 7.99; Stat. *Silv.* 1 *praef.*; 1.6.39-50; 4.4.58. Cf. Sauter (1934).

[403] See Suet. *Dom.* 4.4, 15.3, 17.2; Dio 67.1.2. Suetonius refers to Domitian's affiliation as *superstitiose*, *Dom.* 15.3. Minerva was displayed prominently on the Cancelleria reliefs, see Henderson (2003). Domitian restored the *templum Castorum et Minervae* and set up another shrine to her near the *templum divi Augusti*, see Mart. 5.53.1-2; *ILS* 1998. Cf. Morawiecki (1977) 185-93; Girard (1981) 233-45; Sablayrolles (1994). On coinage, see Carradice (1978) 159-60.

[404] Stat. *Silv.* 3.5.28-31; 4.2.63-7; 5.3.227-9 with Coleman (1988) ad 4.2; Mart. 5.1.1; Suet. *Dom.* 4.4; Juvenal 4.99; Dio 67.1.2. See Scullard (1981) 93-4; Jones (1996) ad Suet. *Dom.* 4.4.

[405] On Domitian's escape, see Stat. *Theb.* 1.21; *Silv.* 1.1.79; Mart. 9.101.13-14; Sil. *Pun.* 3.609; Tac. *Hist.* 3.74; Suet. *Dom.* 1.2. Cf. also on the events of December 69, Wiseman (1978); Wellesley (1981). For the restoration of the temple of Isis and the erection of obelisks in Rome, see Darwall-Smith (1996).

[406] See Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.35-6; 5.3.178; Suet. *Dom.* 8.3-4; Plutarch *Numa* 10.8; Dio 67.3.3-4. Cf. Scott (1936) 187-8; Syme (1958) 65; Jones (1992) 102-3.

[407] Mart. 1.4.7; 5.8.1-3 and Garthwaite (1990); Suet. *Dom.* 7-9 with Jones (1996); Dio 67.4.3-4; Griffin (2000a) 80-3. On the dating of the appointment to April 85 from numismatic evidence, see Carradice (1983) 27, 29.

[408] Suet. *Dom.* 13.1-2; Dio Chrysostom 45.1; Dio 67.4.7; 67.13.3-4; Aurelius Victor *de Caes.* 11.2; *Epit. De Caes.* 11.6; Eutropius 7.23; Orosius 7.10. See Scott (1936) 102-12 for uses of the title in Martial and Statius. Cf. Vessey (1983) 217; Jones (1996) 108-9. For another moral crusade that clearly generated much interest in the ancient world, cf. Domitian's legislation on castration and see Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.74-7; 4.3.13; Mart. 2.60.4; 6.2.2-4; 9.6.4-7; 9.8.5; Philostratus *V. Apoll.* 6.42; Dio

consciously trying to improve the morality of his state and people. *Pietas* was a central feature of the Domitianic regime.

Yet in Flavian epic, this sense of religiosity is not reflected to any great degree. In Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, *pietas*, like *virtus*, occupies a position of lesser importance than it does either in Virgil or in the other Flavian epicists.[409] *Pietas* is invoked less often in a moral sense than it is to indicate merely a performance of some religious ritual. Jason enjoys more remote relationships with the divine sphere and with destiny; his way is far less clear than it is for Virgil's Aeneas, for example. Silius' *Punica* is strikingly similar, where *pietas* is far less prevalent a concept than it is in Virgil,[410] and as Ripoll notes: 'l'empreinte de la *pietas* virgilienne dans les *Punica*, pour être particulièrement visible dans certains passages, n'en demeure pas moins assez superficielle.'[411] For Silius, the quality is an element in the Roman character that explains the essential Roman superiority over other nations, a commonplace notion in Roman thought.[412] *Pietas* in Silius lacks the unity that it has in Virgil; Scipio's *pietas* is confined in sense to duty towards his father.[413] The divine sphere of action and the direction of Roman affairs as destiny prescribes are separated far more from the human sphere of action than they are in the *Aeneid*. The religious commitment of the Roman people is not expressed as *pietas* but as *cura deorum* (*Pun.* 7.75); the abundant variety of Roman religious institutions is something noticeable by its absence in Silius.[414] We should note for the moment that both of Statius' contemporary epic poets substantially reduce the role of *pietas* when compared to Virgil. Gods and men in both epics have far less

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67.2.3; Garnsey (1970) 159; Hopkins (1978) 193-4; Courtney (1980) 309-10; Coleman (1988) ad 4.3.14. On the imperial eunuch Flavius Earinus, see Stat. *Silv.* 3.4; Martial book 9 *passim*; Garthwaite's appendix to Ahl (1984).

[409] Only 17 uses of *pius* and 4 of *pietas*. Compare 34 and 22 uses in Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example. Valerius generally uses abstract vocabulary less often than his Flavian contemporaries. On *pietas* in Valerius, see Ripoll (1998) 256-75.

[410] 20 uses of *pius*, 14 of *pietas* in a much longer poem. On *pietas* in Silius, see Liebeschuetz (1979) 167-82; Ripoll (1998) 275-86. This summary by and large ignores the important influence of Stoic thought upon Silius' poem, mainly because Stoicism has so little influence upon Statius' epic. See Liebeschuetz (1979); Billerbeck (1985); (1986) 3134-45.

[411] Ripoll (1998) 285.

[412] Cf. Polybius 6.56.6-7; Cic. *de Nat. Deo.* 3.2.5; 2.9; *de Harusp. Resp.* 9.19; Prop. 3.22.21-2; Horace *Odes* 3.6.5. See Lind (1972) 250-83.

[413] See Liebeschuetz (1979) 171.

[414] See Liebeschuetz (1979) 173; Feeney (1991) 312.

contact with one another; the gods are more remote than they ever were for Aeneas. Moreover, Silius in particular presents an image of *pietas* that lacks unity. This fractured *pietas* is split into different roles, towards family, the divine, or the state.

The picture is somewhat different in Statius. *Pietas* is a concept that occurs far more frequently in the *Thebaid* than it does in either the *Argonautica* or the *Punica*.[415] Moreover, the concept is more important in the *Thebaid* than in other Flavian epic, and it has been the focus of a number of thematic studies of the poem.[416] Despite this greater interest in the subject, Statius' conception of *pietas* shares a number of features with those of Valerius and Silius. The relationship between men and gods, especially heavenly gods, is far more distant in the *Thebaid* than in the *Aeneid*.[417] Moreover, *pietas* in the *Thebaid* is, as we shall see, marked by fracture, as it is in Silius. Different kinds of *pietas*, towards family, gods and state, are often in opposition to one another, resulting in a corrupted form of *pietas* in conflict with itself rather than in harmony.

1. Pietas *and death.*

Pietas in Statius' epic is marked by debasement, opposition and contradiction. Like *virtus* it is a self-destructive quality, leading the virtuous but ultimately unsuccessful Hopleus and Dymas to their deaths as they attempt in vain to bury their masters. Together with the personified goddess Virtus, the goddess Pietas lowers Menoeceus' corpse gently to earth, thus depriving his suicide of any real purpose. That suicide is itself an exploration of the essential internal conflict within the nature of *pietas* itself, the dubious needs of the state triumphing over the duty that the son has towards his father. It is left to an individual characterised above all by impiety, Capaneus, to fulfil and complete the sacrificial rites that

[415] *Pietas* occurs 21 times, *pius* 31 times. The concept occurs almost as frequently as it does in the *Aeneid*.
[416] Cf. esp. Kytzler (1996); Ripoll (1998) 286-312; Delarue (2000) 356-66; Pollmann (2001).
[417] Although note Coroebus' interaction with Apollo (1.557-692), Amphiaraus' knowledge of fate, Oedipus' summoning of Tisiphone (1.46-87), Virtus inspiring Menoeceus to suicide (10.628-782). Gods and men do interact in Statius, but that interaction is more often marked by conflict than harmony, hardly the stuff of *pietas*.

take place on the walls of Thebes and create a kind of 'reverse-*devotio*' that scatters his own troops in fear. Capaneus is a character who reveals the paradoxes at the heart of Statius' epic concept. He is, like the heroic Menoeceus, empowered and destroyed by his *virtus*, he mimics giants but appears to go further, rivalling Jupiter himself. In the world of Statius' Flavian epic, *pietas* becomes contaminated and ultimately superseded by *virtus*. The sacrifice that completes book 10 is a perverted one, one that fails to conform to norms of Roman religious practice. While *virtus* has been irreversibly corrupted, *pietas* is a virtue without place in the *Thebaid*.

This is confirmed by the appearance of the personified goddess Pietas before the duel of Eteocles and Polynices in Book 11. Pietas sits apart from the gods and complains, but sees the duel as the last opportunity to assert herself among mankind (11.457-81). Although her appearance has the two armies wavering, Tisiphone enlists her sister Megaera and together they drive Pietas away, who goes complaining to Jupiter (11.482-96 a reversal of Book 10, where Virtus descends from Jupiter's side to inspire Menoeceus).[418] The interruption of Pietas reflects what has happened to the value of *pietas* throughout the poem. She sits on her own, offended by men *and* by the gods:

> iamdudum terris coetuque offensa deorum
> *aversa caeli Pietas in parte sedebat*
> ...
> 'quid me' ait 'ut saevis animantum ac saepe deorum
> obstaturam animis, princeps Natura, creabas?
> nil iam ego per populos, nusquam reverentia nostri.'
>
> (*Theb.* 11.457-8, 465-7)

[418] *Theb.* 11.459, *non ore sereno*, serves to separate Pietas from Jupiter, for whom *serenus* is a typical epithet: see Leigh (1997) 59-61.

The gods have committed as many offences against *pietas* as have men and Pietas is ignored as much by the gods as she is by men.[419] Pietas even threatens to leave the heavens and descend into the Underworld, such is the disregard that men have for her (*seseque polis et luce relicta | decensuram Erebo et Stygios iam malle penates*, 11.463-4). Strikingly, she shares many characteristics with Oedipus at this moment; both ignore the heavenly gods and both are ignored by mankind, Polynices and Eteocles in particular (cf. *Theb.* 1.46-87) and the intervention of both invokes the Furies (cf. 1.88-113; 11.482-95), both will realise their worthlessness with an identical and striking proclamation of their own 'non-existence' in book 11 (*nil iam ego*, 11.467; Oedipus says *nil ego*, 11.621, as he laments over his sons' bodies).[420] Her intervention is actually less effective than the similar attempt by Antigone and Jocasta (11.382-8), a comparison that Statius encourages by comparing Pietas to a sister or a mother (*ceu soror infelix pugnantum aut anxia mater*, 11.461).[421] However, it is Tisiphone's speech to Pietas that is most revealing (11.484-92); Pietas has never been in Thebes at any point and she has no place there now. Tisiphone exploits this paradox to the extent that Fury can call Pietas 'impious' (*cede, improba: noster | hic campus nosterque dies*, 11.485-6).

Pietas flees the battlefield and goes complaining to Jupiter (11.495-6). Her departure is something of an inversion of the final lines of the *Aeneid* where Turnus' shade goes into the Underworld:

ast illi solvuntur frigore membra

vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.

(*Aen.* 12.951-2)

deiectam in lumina pallam

[419] On the complex interaction between *pietas* and personified Pietas, see Feeney (1991) 387-9.
[420] On Oedipus' use of *nil ego*, see Hardie (1993) 45.
[421] See Hershkowitz (1998a) 291n.88: 'The intervention of the actual sister and mother was slightly more effective than that of Pietas because, unlike the goddess, the human women were not governed wholly by rational piety but also by madness.'

diva trahit magnoque fugit questura Tonanti

(Theb. 11.495-6)

This is a species of 'death' both for Pietas and for personifications in general in the poem. Pietas will not become involved in the action again, nor will any other personification.[422] *Clementia* is not explicitly accorded this kind of characterisation. This is the end for the two qualities that Virgil made so important in his epic poem. *Virtus* is debased, a self-destructive quasi-virtue, still capable of inspiring memorable deeds, but incapable of provoking morally sound action. The fate of *pietas* is rather different. Statius does not question the value of *pietas*, but instead exposes its capacity for self-contradiction and ultimately its irrelevance in his own epic universe. Statius seemingly discards both *virtus* and *pietas* as he moves forward from the death of brothers to the intervention of Theseus. Both qualities are still invoked of course, but the personifications take no further part in the action.

Such an interpretation is underlined by the episode of Hopleus and Dymas (10.347-448), the two squires of Tydeus and Parthenopaeus respectively, who go out into the battlefield at night to search for their dead masters' bodies. Both are close companions to their kings (*dilecti regibus ambo, | regum ambo comites*, 10.348-9) and are wracked by grief (*quorum post funera maesti | vitam indignantur*, 10.349-50). The pair agree to find the bodies of their kings and pray to Luna for guidance, and she duly shines light on the corpses they seek.[423] However, as the pair find the bodies they are caught by a Theban patrol led by Amphion. Hopleus is killed almost immediately by a Theban spearman.[424] Dymas hesitates and decides to defend the body of Parthenopaeus, but, hugely outnumbered, he loses the

[422] Feeney (1991) 389.

[423] Statius uses a remarkable simile to describe the moon shining her light on the plain (10.373-5). Her sudden shining light is like a lightning bolt thrown by *malus Iuppiter*. The simile is suggestive of ultimate effect that the shining light will have for Hopleus and Dymas, and further links their exceptionally pious actions with those of Capaneus at the end of Book 10.

[424] Hopleus is transfixed from behind by a spear that also injures Tydeus' corpse, 10.400-1. The action is reminiscent of Tydeus' monomachy in book 2, when he transfixes two brothers with one spear, 2.636-8. Hopleus and Tydeus are likewise united in death.

boy's body and begs the Thebans to bury it.[425] Amphion, recognising Dymas's desire to bury his master, offers to exchange Dymas' freedom and Parthenopaeus' body in return for information on the Argive camp. Faced with this dilemma, Dymas immediately kills himself, covering Parthenopaeus' body with his own in a quasi-burial (*hoc tamen interea certe potiare sepulcro*, 10.441).[426] Statius praises both men for their bravery and hopes that Nisus and Euryalus, the two Virgilian characters upon whom Hopleus and Dymas are so closely based, will accept the Statian heroes in Elysium.

Their motivation is directly in contrast with that of Nisus and Euryalus. These two are motivated by a desire for glory (*Aen.* 10.185) and blood lust (*Aen.* 10.354-6) while Hopleus and Dymas are concerned only with a desire to give their masters a proper burial.[427] Pollmann notes the need for burial as a leitmotif throughout the *Thebaid*,[428] but it is interesting to see how the concern for dead bodies is so intimately linked with displays of *virtus* and *pietas*, and with self-destruction. Dymas' defence of Parthenopaeus' corpse is both a display of heroic, if ultimately futile, *virtus* and extreme *pietas*, where suicide becomes the only way he can succeed:

> ponit miserabile corpus
> *ante pedes, tergoque graves quas forte gerebat*
> tigridis exuvias in laevam torquet et obstat
> exertum obiectans mucronem, inque omnia tela
> versus et ad caedem iuxta mortemque paratus:
> ut lea, quam saevo fetam pressere cubili

[425] Is Dymas injured as well? It is unclear whether *erepta manus*, 10.421, refers to Dymas or Parthenopaeus' body, although the obvious contrast between *viro* (420) and *puerique* (421) suggests that Dymas has had a hand lopped off as well.
[426] Here following Shackleton Bailey's emendation, *certe* for †*et tu*, (2003) *ad loc.* A body falling on another is a common feature in epic: Nisus falls on Euryalus' body, *Aen.* 9.444-5; Thisbe commits suicide and falls on Pyramus' body, Ovid *Met.* 4.162-3; Polynices will fall on Eteocles' body, *Theb.* 11.573. The subject of suicide will be dealt with in Chapter 5.
[427] To the extent that the two fear only for the corpses of their masters and Dymas is first uncertain whether to abandon his master's body or defend it and himself, *Theb.* 10.409-19. See Pollmann (2001) 20-22.
[428] Pollmann (2001), esp. 26; (2004) *passim*.

venantes Numidiae, natos erecta superstat,
mente sub incerta torvum ac miserabile frendens;
illa quidem turbare globos et frangere morsu
tela queat, sed prolis amor crudelia vincit
pectora, et a media catulos circumspicit ira.

(*Theb.* 10. 409-19)[429]

Dymas' defence of the body and the simile with which Statius describes it recalls Hippomedon's defence of Tydeus' body in Book 9, where the hero is described as a heifer defending her calf from wolves:

ipse nec ire retro, nec in obvia concitus arma
exilit, inque eadem sese vestigia semper
obversus cunctis profert recipitque, nec umquam
longius indulget dextrae motusque per omnes
corpus amat, corpus servans circumque supraque
vertitur. imbellem non sic amplexa iuvencum
infestante lupo tunc primum feta tuetur
mater et ancipiti circumfert cornua gyro;
ipsa nihil metuens sexusque oblita minoris
spumat et ingentes imitatur femina tauros.

(*Theb.* 9.110-19)[430]

Further aspects of Dymas' defence of the body also recall the Theban Leonteus (a name suggesting lions?) attempting to drag Tydeus' body by the hair (*positumque trahebat*

[429] On Tydeus and animal imagery, see above p.104. Lion imagery is also used for Antigone, see above, p.87.
[430] On *sexusque oblita minoris*, see Dewar (1991) *ad loc*. Manly behaviour is also a feature of Argia and Antigone in Book 12: see above, p.88.

prenso crine caput, 9.134-5; cf. *pueri trahuntur | ora supina comis*, 10.421-2) and losing his hand in the process (*Hippomedon... saevoque protervam | abstulit ense manum*, 9.136-7; cf. *et iam... | erepta manus*, 10.420-1). Hippomedon is ultimately distracted from his defence of Tydeus' body by Tisiphone and the rejoicing Thebans celebrate the capture of Tydeus' corpse in the manner of African hunters who have killed a lion, anticipating the simile that describes a band of Thebans as Numidian hunters and the lone Argive as a lion in Book 10:

> sic ubi Maura diu populatum rura leonem,
> quem propter clausique greges vigilantque magistri,
> pastorum lassae debellavere cohortes:
> gaudet ager, magno subeunt clamore coloni,
> praecerpuntque iubas immaniaque ora recludunt
> *damnaque commemorant, seu iam sub culmine fixus*
> excubat, antiquo seu pendet gloria luco.
>
> (*Theb.* 9.189-95)

Later in Book 9, Capaneus recaptures Hippomedon's body and provides it with a temporary burial (9.540-69). Capaneus transfixes the Theban warrior Hypseus, who had been standing over Hippomedon's body, with a spear, retrieves Hippomedon's sword and helmet and then places these and Hypseus' shield over Hippomedon's body, thus 'covering' Hippomedon's body in an act of burial:

> tunc ensem galeamque rapit clipeumque revellit
> ipsius; exanimumque tenens super Hippomedonta,
> 'accipe' ait 'simul hostiles, dux magne, tuasque

exuvias, veniet cineri decus et suus ordo

manibus; interea iustos dum reddimus ignes,

hoc ultor Capaneus operit tua membra sepulcro.'

561 Hypseos *Markland, Hill* : ipsius Pω, *Shackleton Bailey*

(*Theb.* 9.560-5)

Ironically, neither the giant-like Hippomedon, nor the exceptionally pious Hopleus is able to provide some semblance of a proper burial for Tydeus (that he remains unburied is emphasised, esp. *felix, si corpus ademptum | nesciat*, 10.403-4) while Parthenopaeus is afforded an even less conventional burial when Dymas commits suicide and falls on his master's body (*hoc tamen interea certe potiare sepulcro*, 441). Instead it is Capaneus, the *contemptor divum*, who provides the most conclusive show of *pietas* in performing burial for his comrade Hippomedon.[431] The concern for the bodies of comrades unites Hippomedon, Capaneus and Dymas. Repetition and amplification is again a central motif in Statius' battle-narrative. The way all three seek to defend and bury bodies reveals how far they essentially espouse similar values presented in different ways. The essential characteristics of *virtus* or *pietas* are reflected in their actions, but how far these terms become redundant as descriptors is remarkable. The blasphemous Capaneus, the living embodiment of Pollmann's concept of 'anti-piety', and the super-pious Dymas, whose concern for his master's body allows him even to commit suicide in such a way as to afford Parthenopaeus a form of burial, are indistinguishable in the language of *pietas*.

[431] Although as Dewar (1991) ad 9.561ff. points out, proper burial must wait until the intervention of Theseus, there is, nonetheless, an air of finality about Capaneus' 'burial' of Hippomedon absent from Dymas' covering of Parthenopaeus. Perhaps we should (anachronistically) invoke the Roman law that tombs could not be moved or destroyed (Cic. *Leg.* 2.61) and thus that Capaneus has already created a permanent residence for Hippomedon's shade.

2. Pietas *and the gods.*

One brief example, that of Coroebus, will suffice to demonstrate that the relationship between men and gods which *pietas* represents is badly compromised in Statius' epic. The myth of Linus and Coroebus (*Theb.* 1.557-692) is told by Adrastus to Polynices and Tydeus on their first evening in Argos as an aetiological explanation for the festival to Apollo that is being performed in Argos when they arrive.[432] Adrastus' narrative begins shortly after Apollo's killing of Pytho, and the god interrupts his attempts at penitence when he meets and rapes the daughter of the Argive Crotopus, who produces a son.[433] Knowing her father would not forgive her, she hides the baby with a shepherd. The boy is killed by dogs and Crotopus' daughter breaks her silence and laments her loss. Discovering the truth, Crotopus kills his daughter. Apollo remembers her at this point and produces a monstrous serpent with the face of a woman that ravages the land by eating new born babies. A young warrior named Coroebus gathers a band of men and kills the monster. Apollo becomes even angrier and fires plague-carrying arrows onto the fields and then commands the death of all the men who killed his monster. Coroebus heads to Apollo's shrine on his own and offers his life to Apollo who finally relents and spares Coroebus and removes the plague from Argos.

Kytzler has identified *pietas* as a central theme in this narrative which becomes increasingly important as the epic progresses.[434] Yet the conflict that is inherent within the nature of *pietas* is also apparent from this early episode in the poem. It is Crotopus' household that is described as pious when Apollo rapes his daughter (*huic primis et pubem ineuntibus annis | mira decore pios servabat nata penates | intemerata toris*, 1.571-3) and

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[432] On this episode see Vessey (1970b); (1973) 101-7; Caviglia (1973) *ad loc*; Kytzler (1986); Hill (1989) 113-15; Taisne (1994) 238-47; Ripoll (1998) 294-5, 302-4; Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 84-5, 376-82.

[433] Readers of Statius have assumed that Crotopus is the king of Argos, although there is no indication in the text that this is so, and indeed he is presented as an ordinary individual, *nova deinde piacula caedis | perquirens nostri tecta haud opulenta Crotopi | attigit*, 1.569-71. The *dux* who seeks an oracular solution to the plague at 1.634 need not be identified with Crotopus. The assumption follows Pausanias' account (cf. 1.43.7; 2.16.1; 19.7; 23.7), which differs enough to suggest that Statius may have innovated in his own account. We need not assume therefore that the statue at *Theb.* 2.221 confuses Coroebus and Crotopus.

[434] Kytzler (1986).

the youth and beauty of Crotopus' unmarried daughter are emphasised in contrast to Apollo. *Pietas acts oddly here, in opposition to the god: 'it therefore comes as something of a shock* to see how unattractive is the Apollo presented to us here in this apparent encomium by the blindly pious Adrastus.'[435] Tellingly, Apollo's actions are in direct conflict with another divine group, the *penates* of Crotopus' house. Statius sets up a conflict between duty towards the family and towards the divine. This sense of conflict continues when Coroebus goes to Apollo's shrine. His speech exploits this conflict between the different senses of *pietas:*

> non tu pia degener arma
> *occulis aut certae trepidas occurrere morti*
> comminus ora ferens Cirrhaei in limine templi
> constitit et sacras ita vocibus asperat iras :
> 'non missus, Thymbraee, tuos supplexve penates
> advenio: mea me pietas et conscia virtus
> has egere vias. ego sum qui caede subegi,
> Phoebe, tuum mortale nefas, quem nubibus atris
> et squalente die, nigra quem tabe sinistri
> *quaeris, inique, poli.'*
>
> (*Theb.* 1.639-48)

Statius clearly emphasises Coroebus' *pietas*, while his speech cleverly inverts the norms by stressing the hero's *virtus* and *pietas* in opposition to Apollo's *nefas* and injustice (*inique*), provoking further *sacras iras* (an interesting combination). Moreover, he accentuates the divide between mortal and immortal, by reminding Apollo that his evil was overcome by mortal death (*caede mortale*). Later in the speech, Coroebus refers to the mercilessness of the gods (*saevo tanta inclementia caelo est, 650). The multiple addresses to*

[435] Hill (1989) 114. The use of *decore* also anticipates the play on decorousness and indecorousness in Virtus' visit to Menoeceus in Book 10. See p.151 and Feeney (1991) 384-5.

the god (*Thymbraee, Phoebe, inique*) mimic more conventional prayer formulae. The language of *pietas* is used to create a striking division between the divine and the human realms, especially *pietas* as it is construed towards the state, repeating the opposition between god and familial *pietas* earlier in the narrative.[436] Coroebus' actions clearly anticipate those of Menoeceus, whose suicidal self-sacrifice we will examine in a moment. Coroebus makes a voluntary action that he believes will lead to his death (*certae...morti*, 1.640), in defence of his country (if we read *pietas* in this way) and his actions are linked explicitly to *virtus* and *pietas* (cf. Virtus and Pietas carrying Menoeceus' corpse to earth). Yet there are obvious differences. Several commentators have emphasised the difference implicit in Coroebus' *conscia virtus* from Menoeceus' suicide inspired by Virtus.[437] This display of independent thought and opposition to Apollo hints at the other major figure of Book 10, Capaneus, whose 'atheism' includes prayers and reverence towards his own *virtus* and whose final assault on the walls of Thebes is inspired by a desire to challenge Apollo.[438] Finally, the biggest difference between Coroebus and Menoeceus is that Coroebus is not killed. Adrastus himself comments that *sors aequa merentes | respicit* (1.661-2), a comment that apparently conflicts with the authorial statement preceding the deaths of Hopleus and Dymas, *invida Fata piis* (10.384).[439] Ripoll notes that the simplistic solution, that Adrastus is wrong to say this, lacks sophistication. Yet his development of the problem by comparing *invida Fata piis* to 'moralisme populaire, qui trouve son expression la plus appropriée dans le contexte des choeurs tragiques,' citing Seneca *Dialogi* 11.3.3 (*o dura Fata et nullis aequa virtutibus*) and Seneca *HF* 325-6 (*iniqua raro maximis virtutibus | fortuna parcit*) seems a little overzealous.[440] These comparands suggest a Stoic influence on Statius' statement that

[436] Significantly, Shackleton Bailey's Loeb edition translates *pia arma* (639) as 'patriot deed of arms' and *pietas* (644) as 'love of country'.
[437] E.g. Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 377: 'la *virtus* de Ménécée n'était qu'une incarnation particulière de la Virtus divinisée; Corèbe, lui, revendique la sienne comme lui appartenant en propre.'
[438] *See below p.160.*
[439] See Vessey (1973) 106; Dominik (1994) 69; Ripoll (1998) 303 and nn.229, 232; Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 379.
[440] Ripoll (1998) 303.

does not accord with the largely non-Stoic flavour of the poem.[441] Furthermore, one might suggest that Adrastus' *sententia* is every bit as much 'popular morality' as is the narrator's comment in book 10. The lack of sophistication comes in the suggestion that we can construct an opposition between two characters within Statius' poem (i.e. Adrastus and the narratorial voice). Rather it is the omniscience of the narrator that allows for apparently contradictory statements. Adrastus does not understand the complex and multiform nature of *pietas*, ignoring the possibilities (which, with even greater irony, his own account makes clear) of different forms of *pietas*, towards family, state or gods, coming into conflict with one another, as they do in the Coroebus myth.

Coroebus' display of *virtus* and *pietas* is exceptional in the *Thebaid* as it does not result in his destruction. Yet the conflict of different expressions of *pietas* has proved exceptionally destructive in Adrastus' aetiological myth; Crotopus' killing of his daughter escalates into punishment for the whole populace of Argos, first by a monster, then by the plague. Coroebus matches later Argive heroes such as Tydeus and Hippomedon in his willingness and ability to challenge successfully the authority of the gods. However, Coroebus is less excessive in his display than the heroes of the seven against Thebes. His killing of Apollo's monster lacks a description that is anything more than matter-of-fact or anything equivalent to an *aristeia* (the killing is dealt with briefly, 1.613-16). He merely stands on the threshold of the temple (his refusal to enter may be interpreted as a gesture of *pietas* in itself) and delivers his speech. There is much more to commend Coroebus as an *exemplum* than his Argive descendants.

3. Menoeceus, sacrifice and conflict within pietas.

In essence, the exceptional *pietas* displayed by the squires Hopleus and Dymas towards their dead masters mimics the *virtus* that their masters displayed in life. This quality inspires them towards great deeds, but ultimately the superfluity of *pietas* proves just as self-

[441] See Billerbeck (1985); (1986) on this.

destructive. Coroebus' *pietas* does not result in his death, although he expected as much, but Coroebus' conflict with Apollo illustrates the fractured nature of Statian *pietas* and the uncomfortable truth that the gods of the *Thebaid* are often morally dubious if not utterly bankrupt. Later in Book 10, the suicide of Creon's son Menoeceus provides another opportunity to examine both the interaction between *virtus* and *pietas* and the conflict that lies at the heart of the Statian concept of *pietas*. Following the sequence of night-time raids and counter-attacks, the Argives make an assault on Thebes which threatens to be successful. In the general confusion, some of the Thebans consult Teiresias, who reluctantly performs a prophecy that predicts that Thebes will be saved if the latest born of the serpent race is sacrificed. Creon realises that his son is meant and attempts to silence Teiresias (10.580-629). Meanwhile, the personified goddess Virtus descends to earth and takes the form of Manto, tells Menoeceus of his fate and he withdraws from battle to complete this act (10.628-85).[442] Creon meets Menoeceus and begs him to disregard Teiresias, but Menoeceus deceives his father, claiming that he is instead going to help his wounded brother (10.686-737). Finally we see Menoeceus sacrifice himself on the walls of Thebes (10.756-82).

Creon's intervention is a vain attempt to silence Teiresias while Fama spreads news and details of the prophecy throughout Thebes (*iam Fama sacratam | vocem amplexa volat, clamantque oracula Thebae*, 10.626-7). Yet it is not the personified Fama who brings the news of the prophecy to Menoeceus but the personification Virtus (10.628-33). The choice of agent is surprising; Statius might have employed a more traditional member of the divine pantheon,[443] and, as Feeney points out, she is much more strongly reminiscent of Homer's Eris and Virgil's Fama.[444] Deceitfulness and unseemliness are also central aspects of Statius' portrayal of Virtus. Virtus' disguising herself as Manto is described as *fraus* (10.640). The disguise and the simile which describes it (10.642, 645-9) both create a sense that Virtus is

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[442] On the counter-intuitive and even unseemly femininity of Virtus, amplified by her self-transformation into a female character, see Feeney (1991) 384-5; (1998) 90-1. Cf. Williams (1972) ad 10.646-7. In general on Menoeceus, see Vessey (1971); Heinrich (1999).
[443] So Lewis (1936) 53.
[444] Feeney (1991) 382-5. *Iliad* 4.442-3; *Aen.* 4.176-7. For the close association between Zeus and Eris, cf. *Iliad* 11.3, 73-81. See above, p.98.

operating outside her normal boundaries. She disguises herself as a female non-combatant and removes Menoeceus from the battle, where he has been performing well without Virtus' intervention (*necdum aderat Virtus*, 10.657).[445] The personified deity proves as dangerous and deadly as the abstract *virtus* had to Tydeus and Hippomedon. The goddess Virtus is almost an *alter ego* of Tisiphone.

Yet Menoeceus himself is certainly an appropriate 'victim' of Virtus' advances. Statius changes the narrative order of events that he inherited from Euripides' *Phoenissae* by placing Menoeceus' suicide later in the fighting and juxtaposing his death with that of Capaneus.[446] In Statius' epic he first appears during the teichoscopia as one of the Theban leaders (7.250), displays his leadership during the fighting at Thebes (cf. 8.597-607), and is himself a ruthless warrior:

> flumineam rapiente vado puer Argipus ulmum
> *prenderat, insignes umeros ferus ense Menoeceus*
> amputat; ille cadens, nondum conamine adempto,
> truncus in excelsis spectat sua bracchia ramis.
>
> (*Theb.* 9.266-9)

Menoeceus' killing of Argipus creates obvious parallels between himself and Tydeus and Hippomedon (and Parthenopaeus); Menoeceus anticipates Hippomedon's slaughter of another boy Crenaeus, the grandson of the river Ismenos, while his victim as *puer* is just as far out of his depth as Crenaeus and Parthenopaeus. Moreover, the horrific description of the killing is full of puns and word-play, Argipus playing the tree to Menoeceus' lumberjack; *amputat* carries connotations of tree pruning and Argipus' arms

[445] See Feeney (1991) 383-5.
[446] See Legras (1905) 120-1.

become extra tree branches, while his trunk falls to the ground.[447] When Virtus finds Menoeceus, he is leading the defence of the Dircaean gate and surpassing his elder brother Haemon in the process:

> sed neque te indecorem sacris dignumque iuberi
> *talia Dircaea stantem pro turre, Menoeceu,*
> invenit; inmensae reserato limine portae
> sternebas Danaos, pariter Mavortius Haemon.
> sed consanguinei quamvis atque omnia fratres,
> tu prior: exanimes circum cumulantur acervi;
> omne sedet telum, nulli sine caedibus ictus
> (necdum aderat Virtus);
>
> (*Theb.* 10.650-7)[448]

Indeed, fighting almost as a one-man army and surrounded by heaps of the dead, Menoeceus bears more than a passing resemblance to Tydeus during his *aristeia* in Book 8.[449] Virtus' initial speech in the guise of Manto proves unsuccessful (10.661-71); Menoeceus is wavering until Virtus 'leaves herself in his heart':

> sic ait, et magna cunctantis pectora dextra
> *permulsit tacite seseque in corde reliquit.*
> fulminis haud citius radiis afflata cupressus

[447] *OLD* s.v. *amputo* 2, 3; s.v. *bracchium* 4. The word-play is a much more condensed reworking of Lucan 3.610-65: see Dewar (1991) *ad loc.* More on the metaphorical link between trees and battlefield deaths below.

[448] Note the sophisticated translingual pun on the Greek *haimon*, 'bloody', and *consanguinis*.

[449] Delarue (2000) 355-6 notes that Menoeceus is the one Theban warrior explicitly accorded the quality of *virtus*. He is wrong however in his conclusion that *virtus* is a distinctly Argive quality. Argive warriors are the main exponents of *virtus* in the *Thebaid* simply because it is upon them that Statius focuses his attention. We see little of the Theban leaders mentioned in the teichoscopia, 7.254-373. E.g. Dryas is described as a true grandson of Orion because of his *virtus* (*Orionis alti | non falsus virtute nepos*, 7.256-7).

combibit infestas et stirpe et vertice flammas,
quam iuvenis multo possessus numine pectus
erexit sensus letique invasit amorem.

(*Theb.* 10.672-7)

The simile links Menoeceus to the other major figure of Book 10, Capaneus.[450] Menoeceus is described as a cypress tree, a term which evokes not only Hippomedon's death and the simile that described him as a falling tree (9.532-9), but also Capaneus' spear, twice described as a cypress tree stripped of branches (4.177; 7.676).[451] Creon's son is overwhelmed by the goddess in terms which match exactly the manner in which Capaneus will be overwhelmed by Jupiter at the end of Book 10, struck by lightning and burnt. The imagery of trees increasingly becomes a figure for untimely death in the poem.

Moral conflict is a central theme throughout this episode. Teiresias is himself reluctant to indulge the Theban people with yet more prophecy, but is motivated by the fear of Thebes falling into Argive hands (10.594-6) and then admits that his better judgment has been beaten (*vincamur, Pietas*, 10.597). Teiresias makes the sacrificial nature of the gods' demands clear from the start (*Martius inferias et saeva efflagitat anguis | sacra*, 10.612-13). Creon instantly comprehends the full meaning of Teiresias' prophecy and his fear is presented in terms which emphasise that he is Menoeceus' father (*stupet anxius alto | corda metu glaciante pater*, 10.621-2). Teiresias almost suggests that his prophetic utterance runs counter to the desire of Pietas, while Creon's reaction emphasises the conflict between his role as father and his role as a member of Thebes' royal family. When they meet following Virtus' intervention, Creon's speech to his son revolves around alternative expressions and interpretations of *pietas* (10.690-718). Creon attempts to persuade Menoeceus to a different course of action by appealing to his sense of *pietas* towards his family:

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[450] The phrase *seseque in corde reliquit* may also recall Tydeus' reflexive, and self-destructive relationship with *virtus*, cf. *sese agnovit in illo*, 8.753, and see above, p.120.
[451] On Hippomedon's death, see above, p.132. Cf. also Smolenaars (1994) ad 7.676.

'hoc, oro, munus concede parenti.
sic tua maturis signentur tempora canis,
et sis ipse parens et ad hunc, animose, timorem
pervenias: ne perge meos orbare penates.
externi te nempe patres alienaque tangunt
pignora? si pudor est, primum miserere tuorum.
haec pietas, hic verus honos; ibi gloria tantum
ventosumque decus titulique in morte latentes.
nec timidus te flecto parens: *i*, proelia misce
...
hoc malunt Thebae.'

(*Theb.* 10.705-13, 718)

Creon appeals to a conflicting sense of *pietas*: Menoeceus' duty towards his family, represented in divine form as their *penates*. Yet the father's entreaties have no effect upon the young man now vowed to the gods (*dis votum*, 10.720), who picks up the theme of *fraus* in Virtus' appearance and plays a silent trick (*fraude...tacita*, 10.721) on his father and pretends that he is looking for help for his wounded brother (10.722-34). Feeney comments: '*note how Menoeceus' first word to his father is falleris: 'you are mistaken (to assume what* you assume)', and also, clearly, 'you are being deceived (by me as I speak to you).'[452] Menoeceus' trick also involves an appeal to his father's first instinct, for his family.

Despite the intervention of Virtus, Menoeceus' suicide on behalf of the people of Thebes is, or ought to be, a colossal act of *pietas*. The sense that Virtus acts outside her normal sphere of influence anticipates this, and when Menoeceus reaches the top of the walls where he kills himself, religious language indicates that this deed is a sacrifice to the gods:

at pius electa murorum in parte Menoeceus

[452] Feeney (1991) 383n.222.

iam sacer aspectu solitoque augustior ore,

ceu subito in terras supero demissus ab axe

(*Theb.* 10.756-8)

Menoeceus' suicide on the walls of Thebes is reminiscent of Astyanax flung from the walls of Troy by Neoptolemus in the *Little Iliad* and in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, but resembles most closely Seneca's depiction of Astyanax in his *Trojan Women*.[453] Seneca's Astyanax is led to his death by Ulysses but seemingly goes up the walls willingly (*nec gradu segni puer | ad alta pergit moenia, Tro.* 1090-1). Astyanax is compared in a simile to the cub of a wild beast (*qualis ingentis ferae | parvus tenerque fetus et nondum potens | saevire dente iam tamen tollit minas | morsusque inanes temptat atque animis tumet*, 1093-6) as he gazes defiantly at the Greek spectators who surround the tower (1080-7). Finally, unlike the earlier Greek versions, where he is thrown from the tower by Neoptolemus, Seneca depicts the boy jumping of his own accord (*sponte desiluit sua | in media Priami regna*, 1102-3).[454] The defiance behind this act of independence in death is crucial: 'Astyanax's suicide disrupts the rites, exposing the savage realities behind their [the Greeks'] irrelevant (and perverse) religious form.'[455]

Furthermore, Menoeceus refers to himself as a *hostia* (*Theb.* 10.769); the act of spattering the walls of Thebes with his blood is one of purification (*arripit atque uno quaesitam vulnere rumpit. | sanguine tunc spargit turres et moenia lustrat*, 10.776-7). Menoeceus presents his suicide as a form of *devotio*.[456] Indeed, Statius' depiction of

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[453] *Little Iliad* fr. 20W; Eur. *Tro.* 1133-9; Sen. *Tro.* 1088-1103. Cf. Ovid *Met.* 13.415-17.

[454] The incongruous image of Astyanax as a wild animal is perhaps most strongly reminiscent of Statius' Antigone: see above p.87, although all the *Thebaid*'s heroes are compared to wild animals. On the simile see Boyle (1994) ad *Tro.* 537.

[455] Boyle (1994) ad 1102.

[456] A different and related rite, also known as *devotio*, is attested at Macrobius *Sat.* 3.9.9-13. See Oakley (1998) 380-3. The ritual in Macrobius is more likely to be primary and the *devotio* described in Livy may be a development of the ritual from Rome's very earliest history, see Versnel (1976); Oakley (1998) 481.

Menoeceus' suicide is modelled upon the *devotiones* of the Decii as told by Livy.[457] The self-sacrifice of the Decii involved self-consecration; in the closest parallel passage (Livy 8.9-11.1), the consul P. Decius Mus rode into the ranks of the enemy, inspiring his troops to win the battle and, as Livy comments, diverted all the dangers from heavenly and infernal gods onto himself (*quorum alter omnes minas periculaque ab deis superis inferisque in se unum vertit*, Livy 8.10.7), becoming *sacrum* to the gods of the underworld in return for the destruction of Rome's enemies. All three stories of Decii devoting themselves share many of the standard elements of substitutionary sacrifice; they sacrifice themselves for the good of the state in time of war, and as leaders of their citizens are appropriate substitutions for their state; their actions exemplify the tradition of *unus pro omnibus*, they are willing victims and are heroized by their people after their deaths. As such the Decii have much in common with other Romans famous for suicidal self-sacrifice (e.g. M. Curtius, see Livy 7.6.1-6) as well as the Menoeceus of Greek tragedy.[458] The *devotio* clearly held a fascination for Romans, and the ritual features in the writings of Cicero, Virgil and Lucan.[459]

Yet Heinrich has demonstrated that: 'Menoeceus' suicide represents a failed *devotio*, one distorted into a spectacle of pure self-destruction, a microcosm of Thebes itself.'[460] Menoeceus' breaks one of the key 'rules' of *devotio* by killing himself instead of being killed by the enemy (*mactatio*).[461] Indeed, Menoeceus ignores his father's imprecations that his son meet his death by rushing into the midst of the enemy (*i, proelia misce,| i Danaas acies mediosque per obvius enses, Theb. 10.713-14*). Following his suicidal sword thrust, Menoeceus attempts to throw himself as a weapon onto the Argive troops below, but this is prevented by Virtus and Pietas, who bring his body gently to earth:

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[457] See Vessey (1973) 239 for reminiscences of Livy 8.9.10 at *Theb.* 10.757-9; Heinrich (1999) 181. On *devotio* generally see Versnel (1981); Barton (1993) 40-6; Oakley (1998) ad Livy 8.8.19-11.1. P. Decius Mus is said to have devoted himself at the battle of Veseris in 340 BC, his son at the battle of Sentinum in 295 BC and another Decius tried to devote himself at Ausculum in 279 BC. On this dubious (in the factual sense) tradition, see Oakley (1998) 477-80.

[458] See Versnel (1981) 143-63; Oakley (1998) 96-100, 482-3. Cf. Soph. *OC* 498-9; Eur. *El.* 1024-6; fr.360 16-18.

[459] See Cic. *Quir.* 1; *Sest.* 48; Virg. *Aen.*12.234 with Pascal (1990); Leigh (1997) 128-43 on *devotio* imagery in Lucan.

[460] Heinrich (1999) 182.

[461] Compare ancient accounts of Decius' *devotio*: Cicero *de Fin.* 2.61; Seneca *Ep.* 67.9; Florus 1.14.3; Orosius 3.9.3 with Versnel (1981) 150 and Heinrich (1999) 183-4.

sanguine tunc spargit turres et moenia lustrat,
seque super medias acies, nondum ense remisso,
iecit et in saevos cadere est conatos Achivos.
ast illum amplexae Pietas Virtusque ferebant
leniter ad terras corpus; nam spiritus olim
ante Iovem et summis apicem sibi poscit in astris.

(*Theb.* 10.777-82)

As Heinrich comments: 'his attempts are foiled: Pietas and Virtus ensure that his suicide will be deprived of any military relevance...the ritually prescribed rush by the devoted *in* (or *super*) *medias acies* is displaced, rendering Menoeceus' act one of pure self-immolation. Statius does not simply retail Meneoceus' Euripidean suicide: he calls attention to it, representing *mactatio* as a replacement of *devotio*.'[462] Furthermore, Statius' own transformation of tragedy highlights the differences between Astyanax and Menoeceus. The Theban hero is no longer a child as he was in the Euripidean version, but an adult warrior and yet it is the small boy who comes closer to the Roman act of *devotio* plunging headlong and shattering his body on the rocks below (Sen. *Tro.* 1110-17) and causing recognition of *nefas* amongst his Greek audience (*praeceps ut altis cecidit e muris puer | flevitque Achivum turba quod fecit nefas, Tro. 1118-19*). The manner of Astyanax's death suggests the role of the Stoic *sapiens*, who, according to Seneca, stands above the abyss defiantly and leaps where he is due to fall (*stabit super illam voraginem intrepidus et fortasse quo debebit cadere desiliet*, Sen. *NQ* 6.32.4).[463] Menoeceus never quite succeeds in letting go; Virtus and Pietas prevent Stoic death as well as Roman *devotio*.

[462] Heinrich (1999) 185.
[463] Offering oneself to fate is a Stoic ideal (*praebere se fato*, Sen. *Prov.* 5.8) and is also a characteristic of genuine gladiators, to whom the *sapiens* is compared (cf. Sen. *Tran.* 11.4-5; *Ep.* 30.8; 70.20-7).

The suicide and sacrifice seem futile and without effect; it is Capaneus' death on the same walls that provokes a rout amongst Argive troops, Capaneus' death that provides the after-effects of a true *devotio* (*Theb.* 11.21-26; cf. Livy 8.9.10). Worse still, it is as a result of his son's death that Creon becomes increasingly unstable, urging Eteocles to fight his brother (11.263-5), himself becoming a replacement tyrant (his popularity stems in part from his son's suicide, 11.652-4) and ordering that Argive dead remain unburied whilst swearing an oath by the gods and by Menoeceus (*per superos magnumque Menoecea*, 12.103).[464] The link between Capaneus and Menoeceus is a powerful one, achieved partly through the shift from the Euripidean pattern and juxtaposition at the climax of Book 10, and partly through the shared themes of sacrifice and *virtus* that both warriors share.[465] A brief sketch of Capaneus' character will follow, before we return to the connection between his death and that of Menoeceus.

4. Capaneus and lustration.

Virtus is exemplified by Tydeus and is repeated and even exceeded by Hippomedon. It not only acts as an isolating and self-destructive force but also acts against the power of *pietas*. It reveals itself principally through the imagery of giants and centaurs, but does so in a way which is destabilising and disconcerting. The Theban heroes threaten to become more powerful than the divine; the giants have the power to defeat the gods. There is no character in the *Thebaid* who embodies these characteristics of *virtus* more than Capaneus. He is a powerful mixture of the gigantic and the impious, a combination and amplification of the gigantomachic Capaneus of Greek tragedy and Virgil's Mezentius.[466]

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[464] See Vessey (1973) 131; Heinrich (1999) 188-90.
[465] Fantham (1995) suggests that the juxtaposition serves to undercut Menoeceus' *virtus* by placing it next to Capaneus' *virtus egressa modum*, while Heinrich (1999) 186-90 who notes the connection and implies that Capaneus acts as a replacement for Menoeceus in the act of *devotio*.
[466] On the links between Capaneus and Mezentius, see Legras (1905) 216; Venini (1961) 389; Snijder (1968) ad 3.602; Klinnert (1970) 18; Caiani (1990) 266-9; Delarue (2000) 83-6. For Capaneus in Greek tragedy, cf. esp. Aes. *Sept.* 423-34; Eur. *Phoen.* 1172-86; also Eur. *Supp.* 496-7; *Phoen.* 180-1, 1128-9; Soph. *OC* 1318-9.

Capaneus' first appearance in the text is marked by gigantic imagery; the first stirrings of war compared to Enceladus causing an earthquake (3.593-7).[467] The character sketch that introduces him in Book 3, as he goes to harangue the prophet Amphiaraus,[468] establishes Capaneus as a figure most similar to Tydeus and Hippomedon:

> atque hic ingenti Capaneus Mavortis amore
> excitus et longam pridem indignantia pacem
> corda tumens (huic ampla quidem de sanguine prisco
> nobilitas; sed enim ipse manu praegressus avorum
> facta, diu tuto superum contemptor et aequi
> *impatiens largusque animae, modo suaserit ira),*
> unus ut e silvis Pholoes habitator opacae
> inter et Aetnaeos aequus consurgere fratres
>
> (*Theb.* 3.598-605)

In the manner of the other Argive heroes, Hippomedon and Tydeus, Capaneus is a monstrous figure like a centaur or a cyclops, but the sketch reveals an added feature in his character. He is also a *superum contemptor*, a despiser of the gods, and in his speech he equates belief with cowardice (*(quisquis is est, timidis Famaeque ita visus) Apollo*, 3.612) and later claims that the gods are only the product of men's fears (*primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, 3.661). Instead he claims *virtus* as his only 'deity' (*virtus mihi numen et ensis | quem teneo*, 3.615-6) and later prays to his right hand for strength (*ades o mihi, dextera, tantum | tu praesens bellis et inevitabile numen, | te voco, te solam superum contemptor adoro*, 9.548-50). Capaneus styles himself *contemptor divum*, but does invoke personifications and

[467] See Vessey (1973) 157; Lovatt (2005) 131. On Capaneus as a giant, see Klinnert (1970) 11-78; Vessey (1973) 123; Frings (1991) 10-16; Ripoll (1998) 340-7; Lovatt (2005) 128-39 who constructs important parallels between Capaneus and Jupiter, and constructs Capaneus as a 'poet figure' within the text.

[468] On this clash, see Snijder (1968) 235-9; Klinnert (1970) 11-21; Vessey (1973) 157-9; Frings (1991) 10-16.

qualities, following the shift in Statius' poem away from the traditional divine pantheon towards more abstract gods.[469] Such a theological position puts Statius' Capaneus rather apart from his literary predecessors; he is not simply an atheist but rather a character who understands better than most the realities of the multifaceted divine apparatus at work in the *Thebaid*. His belief in his own reasoning, his invocation of his own right hand as a 'deity' places him rather closer to the 'atheists' of Aristophanic comedy, such as the Euripides of *Frogs* who prays to 'other gods'.[470] Capaneus almost assumes a philosophical aspect, climbing the walls of Thebes to test if his non-belief in the gods is correct (*experiar quid sacra iuvent, an falsus Apollo*, 10.847).[471]

His appearance in the catalogue of Argive troops gives him a gigantic air. He is taller than any of the men in the Argive army (*at pedes et toto despectans vertice bellum*, 4.165). He even has a giant depicted on his helmet (*galeaeque corusca | prominet arce Gigans*, 4.175-6). His spear is so huge that it is a branchless cypress tree with a sharpened tip (*atque uni missilis illi | cuspide praefixa stat frondibus orba cupressus*, 4.176-7; cf. *cupressum*, 7.676). His boxing match also reinforces the gigantic imagery. Statius emphasises Capaneus' size (*constitit inmanis cerni inmanisque timeri | Argolicus Capaneus*, 6.731-2; cf. *inmane lacerto*, 9.547) and his use of *virtus* in boxing (*haec bellis et ferro proxima virtus*, 6.730), and Capaneus himself declines to stain his *virtus* with the blood of a fellow countryman (*nec mea crudelis civili sanguine virtus*, 6.737).

As he makes his final assault upon Thebes, his gigantic status becomes most clear. His desire to climb the heights mimics giants attempting to invade Mount Olympus (*innumeros gradus gemina latus arbore clausos | aerium sibi portat iter*, 10.841-2), and when he reaches the top of the walls he terrifies the Theban populace with his huge shadow

[469] See Feeney (1991).
[470] Arist. *Frogs* 888-94.
[471] *OLD* s.v. *experior* 1.

(*ingenti Thebas exterruit umbra*, 10.872).[472] Later on, he is compared to the Aloidae piling Pelion upon Ossa:

> dicit, et alterno captiva in moenia gressu
> *surgit ovans: quales mediis in nubibus aether*
> vidit Aloidas, cum cresceret impia tellus
> despectura deos nec adhuc inmane veniret
> Pelion et trepidum iam tangeret Ossa Tonantem
>
> (*Theb.* 10.848-52)

Once again, we see that the extreme nature of human *virtus* can overthrow the accepted laws of the cosmos itself, as Lovatt remarks: 'the story of the Aloidae is frozen at the moment of their greatest success, as if about to conquer: Jupiter is frightened (though calling him Thunderer reminds us what he is about to do), and the lines of visual power are in the process of being reversed.'[473] His huge size is again emphasised as he climbs the walls; he hangs in mid-air as though his feet were still planted on the ground (*vacuoque sub aere pendens | plana velut terra certus vestigia figat*, 10.861-2). The image reminds us of the goddess Virtus as she descended to Menoeceus earlier in Book 10. As Capaneus builds up to his challenge to Jupiter, he indulges in perhaps the most obviously gigantic moment of rock-throwing, tearing the walls of Thebes apart and hurling them at temples and houses (10.877-82).[474] Finally, Capaneus is explicitly compared to giants as Jupiter prepares to strike him with a thunderbolt (*Stygias rupisse catenas | Iapetum aut victam supera ad convexa levari | Inarimen Aetnamve putes*, 10.915-17).

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[472] The simile which likens Capaneus to a river, 10.864-9, is reminiscent of Hippomedon's battle with the river Ismenus, but Statius has once again reversed the obvious roles for man and god, making Capaneus the river battering a bridge into submission.
[473] Lovatt (2005) 132. Cf. Goff (1988) 50, who notes a similar moment in the gigantomachic imagery of Euripides' *Ion*. Cf. also Virgil *Geo.* 1.281-3.
[474] Heinrich (1999) 188 notes that this is precisely what Menoeceus' sacrifice was meant to avoid.

Here we must return to the manner of Capaneus' death and Menoeceus. It is not merely juxtaposition that links these two, but their relationship as elements within a perverted sacrifice on behalf of Thebes. Menoeceus' suicide not only acts as a failed *devotio*, but also within a wider context as sacrificial imagery where both his and Capaneus' life are figured as sacrifices which save the city. Specifically, Menoeceus' suicide represents a form of lustration where his blood is sprinkled on the walls and towers that stand for city and its people, effectively becoming an altar for Thebes, and his suicide is consistently referred to in these terms. Moreover, shortly before the people of Thebes press Teiresias for his prophecy, the Argive warrior Antheus circles the walls in his chariot. He is killed by a spear but his chariot continues around the walls and his head, shield and spear create three furrows in the plain:

> Anthea falcato lustrantem moenia curru
> *desuper Ogygiae pepulit gravis impetus hastae;*
> lora excussa manu, retroque in tergo volutus
> semianimos artus ocreis retinentibus haeret;
> mirandum visu belli scelus: arma trahuntur,
> fumantesque rotae tellurem et tertius hastae
> sulcus arat
>
> (*Theb.* 10.544-50)

A relatively insignificant moment in the fighting is suggestive of one important preparatory rite of a *lustratio*, the *circumambulatio*, a circular procession around the object or place to be purified, normally performed three times. This remains only a suggestion; the verb *lustro* can mean 'to circle around' without a religious overtone, and Antheus does not explicitly circle Thebes three times, but his dead body draws three furrows.[475] Yet Statius' language here becomes more important when taken with the description of Menoeceus'

[475] *OLD* s.v. *lustro, lustrare* 2. Cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.22.

suicide which follows soon after. What is more, Antheus' quasi-*circumambulatio* acts as an important and consistent element in the *lustratio* ritual as it was performed at Rome. If Antheus' death can be read as the preliminary element in Menoeceus' lustration of the walls, the bizarre approximation to proper religious practices indicates that once again we are faced with a corruption of the normal sacrificial process.

The *lustratio* was a complex and varied religious ritual consistently attached to a wider sacrificial context and never performed in isolation.[476] The original ritual probably consisted of purification by ablution in water. Later *lustrationes* consisted in the sprinkling of water with a laurel or olive branch, and at Rome sometimes with the *aspergillum*, and in the burning of certain materials, whose smoke was thought to have a purifying effect. Whenever sacrifices were offered, it seems to have been customary to carry them around the person or the thing to be purified. The Romans broadened the Greek context for lustration enormously, performing the ritual on many occasions where the Greeks would not have thought to do so. Fields could be purified after sowing (Ovid *Fasti* 1.669) and lustration appears to have been carried out in agricultural contexts generally (Tib. 2.1). Sheep were lustrated every year at the festival of the Parilia, as described in Ovid's *Fasti*. The shepherd towards evening sprinkled his flock with water, adorned the fold with branches and foliage, burnt pure sulphur and various herbs, and offered sacrifices to Pales (*Fasti* 4.735-46; cf. Cato *de Re Rustica* 100.141). All Roman armies were lustrated before they took the field (Cass. Dio 47.38; Appian *Civil.* 4.89). Similarly, fleets were purified before they set sail. Altars were erected on the shore, and the vessels manned with their troops assembled in order close to the coast. Everybody kept silent, and priests standing close by the water killed the victims, and carried the purifying sacrifices in small boats three times around the fleet. On these rounds they were accompanied by the generals, who prayed to the gods to preserve the fleet from all dangers. Then the priests divided the sacrifices into two parts, one of which was thrown into the sea, and the other burnt upon the altars, while the multitude around

[476] Generally on the *lustratio* see Ogilvie (1961); Versnel (1975); (1985-6). On the verb *lustrare* in aftermath narratives, see Pagán (2000) 433.

prayed to the gods (cf. Livy 29.27, where also a prayer is recorded such as generals used to offer on these occasions; 36.42).[477] A regular and general *lustratio* of the whole Roman people took place after the completion of every *lustrum*, when the censor had finished his census and before he laid down his office. The *lustratio* was conducted by one of the censors (Cic. *de Divin.* 1.45), and held with sacrifices called *suovetaurilia* (Livy 1.44; Varro *de Re Rust.* 2.1), because the sacrifices consisted of a pig (or ram), a sheep, and an ox. This *lustratio*, which continued to be observed in the days of Dionysius, took place in the Campus Martius, where the people assembled for the purpose. The sacrifices were carried three times around the assembled multitude (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.22). Lustration of the city was a ritual of boundary protection where a priest would proceed three times around the pomerium of the city before sacrificing a pig, a sheep and an ox (the *suovetaurilia*).[478]

The concluding section of Book 10 of the *Thebaid* contains a large number of elements recognisable from Roman lustration ritual practices. Menoeceus' death is explicitly a *lustratio*: he calls the war to halt and ritual silence descends upon both sides in the conflict (*clamore profundo | convertit campum iussitque silentia bello*, 10.760-1); he sprinkles and thus purifies the walls of Thebes with his blood (*sanguine tunc spargit turres et moenia lustrat*, 10.777).[479] Menoeceus' mother Eurydice refers to her son's death in exactly the same terms:

> lustralemne feris ego te, puer inclute, Thebis
>
> devotumque caput vilis ceu mater alebam?

[477] Lustrations also marked the foundation of colonies (Cic. *De Div.* 1.45) and any bad event, such as civil conflict (Livy 35.9; 42.20), and were instituted every February (Macrobius *Sat.* 1.13).
[478] On the ritual for boundary protection of the city see e.g. Livy 3.18.10, 3.29.9 with Ogilvie (1965) *ad loc*; Livy 21.62.7; 35.9.5; 39.27.5; 44.18.6-7; Pliny *NH* 10.36; Tac. *Ann.* 13.24; *Hist.* 1.87.1 with Damon (2003) *ad loc.*; Obsequens 12; 44; 46. Cf. Livy 8.10.14 and Oakley (1998) *ad loc.* on the exceptional circumstances when a *suovetaurilia* sacrifice can follow a *devotio*.
[479] See also Jocasta's 'lustration' of couch in suicide, *infelix lustratur sanguine lectus* 11.641 and Creon's wish that Oedipus' banishment will 'lustrate' the walls of Thebes, *et Furias averte ac moenia lustra | discessu Thebana tuo* 11.670-1.

quae sacra insania menti?

(*Theb.* 10.793-4, 804)

We can see a continuation of a single religious and sacrificial process from the death of Antheus through to the suicide of Menoeceus; both deaths form part of a single ritual. Demarcated and drenched in sacrificial blood, the walls of Thebes become a substitute altar to Apollo (the god to whom Menoeceus prays, 10.763; the god whose existence Capaneus questions, 10.847). This is a sinister sacrifice; the ritual of purification that has its origins in *ablution in water has merged with human sacrifice. As before when examining Antheus'* death, we can see sacrificial ritual that has been corrupted almost beyond recognition. Yet Menoeceus' sacrifice has much in common with Capaneus' destruction by lightning. Tired of earthly battles, Capaneus makes a revealing speech before climbing the walls of Thebes:

'hac' ait 'in Thebas, hac me iubet ardua virtus
ire, Menoeceo qua lubrica sanguine turris.
experiar quid sacra iuvent, an falsus Apollo.'
dicit, et alterno captiva in moenia gressu
surgit ovans

(*Theb.* 10.845-9)

Capaneus climbs the same walls that Menoeceus turned into an altar and now drip with his blood. Capaneus seems aware of the gap between Menoeceus' suicide and saving Thebes, questioning the worth of his actions. Heinrich comments: 'Statius represents Capaneus' *aristeia* as an explicit test of the efficacy of Menoeceus' sacrifice, a test that further undercuts the terminal possibilities of the young Theban's *devotio*...Capaneus begins *his attack on these very same walls...despite Menoceus' lustration, the walls are already as*

good as *captiva*.'[480] Moreover, he recognises the wall as a place with a sacrificial context and is impelled by *virtus* just as Menoeceus was. Indeed we might be tempted to capitalise the v; Capaneus has shown his repeated contempt for the gods, but admires personified qualities including Virtus and his own Right Hand (4.615-6; 9.548-50). The impetus behind Menoeceus' suicide and Capaneus' assault seems closer than ever.

When Jupiter finally does strike him, Capaneus creates the effect that was lacking in Menoeceus' failed *devotio*, although it is left until the next book before we are told which terrified army is routed by his falling corpse (*cedunt acies, et terror utrimque, | quo ruat, ardenti feriat quas corpore turmas*, 10.930-1); both sides fear the falling corpse, and Statius hints that it might easily be the Theban forces who would be routed, further undermining the efficacy of Menoeceus' sacrifice. Like Hippomedon before him, Capaneus almost withstands the power of the gods, nearly standing long enough to merit a second thunderbolt (*paulum si tardius artus | cessissent, potuit fulmen sperare secundum*, 10.938-9). However, his body also acts as another element within the ritual lustration of Thebes' walls for which Menoeceus' suicide was only a part. Capaneus becomes a burnt offering. Statius continues to describe Capaneus in gigantic terms even after his death, where his huge body lying on the plains outside the walls of Thebes is compared to the body of Tityos:

> quantus Apollineae temerator matris Averno
> tenditur; ipsae horrent, si quando pectore ab alto
> emergent volucres inmensaeque membra iacentis
> spectant, dum miserae crescent in pabula fibrae:
> sic gravat iniectus terras hostiliaque urit
> *arva et inhelantem caelesti sulphuri campum.*
>
> (11.12-17)

Again, Lovatt captures the sense of inversion at the heart of Statius' gigantic imagery: 'Statius reverses the normal structure of horror and gaze here: we do not look down

[480] Heinrich (1999) 187-8.

on the horror of Tityos' entrails eaten by birds, instead we look from the point of view of the *birds at the horror of the body which defies nature with its size... the chain of imagery* throughout the representation of Capaneus makes his assault on Thebes a cosmic disturbance.'[481] The scale of that disturbance is made plain by the reaction of the gods, who react as though Jupiter had just completed an enormous act of gigantomachy (*gratantur superi, Phlegrae ceu fessus anhelet | proelia et Encelado fumanti impresserit Aetnen*, 11.7-8).[482] Moreover, he further repeats and amplifies the nature of *virtus* that was exemplified first of all by Tydeus, and later by Hippomedon. Capaneus' status as *contemptor divum*, his conflict with Jupiter and the confusion between these two that Statius incorporates into his *narrative all suggest a relationship with the other key Virgilian virtue that we identified* earlier, *pietas*.[483] Yet he also continues the imagery of lustration that so strongly pervaded the narration of Antheus' death and Menoeceus' suicide. Capaneus' death by thunderbolt mimics the ritual purification of sheep that Ovid describes in the *Fasti*:

caerulei fiant puro de sulpure fumi,
tactaque fumanti sulpure balet ovis.
ure mares oleas taedamque herbasque Sabinas,
et crepet in mediis laurus adusta focis

(Ovid *Fasti* 4.739-42)

In a sense, Capaneus' death is the completion of the lustration that saves Thebes, and the citizens within the temples recognise the turn of events in their favour (11.18-20). Yet Capaneus' burning does not carry the proper sense of purification of the fields around Thebes. Instead the earth burns, the land is burdened and gasping under the sulphur;

[481] Lovatt (2005) 132-3. One wonders whether the birds actually eat Capaneus' flaming corpse, given the emphasis in the simile upon their horrified reaction to it.
[482] The 'combat' between Jupiter and Capaneus has an air of gladiatorial fighting about it, with the audience of gods afraid at the sight of Capaneus, 10.917-20 and applauding his death, 11.7. The *superi* act like an involved audience in the amphitheatre, worrying for their favourite and cheering his victory.
[483] For the assimilation of Jupiter and Capaneus, see Lovatt (2005) 133-6.

Capaneus' death too is marked with a corruption of ritual. It is almost as if further sacrifices are being made; the land struggles to breathe (*inhelantem campum*) while the citizens who inhabit it can breathe again (*respirant Thebae*, 11.18). By examining the individual deaths of Antheus, Menoeceus and Capaneus, we can see that Statius has contaminated the latter half of Book 10 and the opening of Book 11 with imagery of corrupted elements of the *lustratio*. Taking these three deaths together, we can further reinforce the picture that all are elements in the same sacrificial process. The treatment given to Menoeceus' corpse is astonishing; both sides break off fighting to allow the body due reverence, and the manner of that reverence is reminiscent of the more rural rituals that are associated with the purifications described by Ovid:

> iamque intra muros nullo sudore receptum
> *gaudentes heroa ferunt: abscesserat ultro*
> Tantalidum venerata cohors; subit agmine longo
> colla inter iuvenum, laetisque favoribus omni
> concinitur vulgo Cadmum atque Amphiona supra
> conditor; hi sertis, hi veris honore soluto
> accumulant artus patriaque in sede reponunt
> corpus adoratum.
>
> (*Theb.* 10.783-90)

His corpse is recovered without the effort that marked the fighting over Tydeus' body in Book 9 (*nullo sudore*) and even more disconcertingly it is decorated with fertility symbols (cf. *frondibus et fixis decorentur ovilia ramis, | et tegat ornatas longa corona fores*, Ovid *Fasti* 4.737-8). The combination of blood and ashes that Menoeceus and Capaneus come to represent replicates a central feature of lustration ritual (cf. Ovid *Fasti* 4.731-3). The separation between the recovered body of Menoeceus and the corpse of Capaneus left untouched outside the walls of Thebes copies the separation of sacrifice into two parts in the

lustration of armies (Livy 29.27; 36.42). We might even go so far as to suggest that the three deaths of Antheus, Menoeceus and Capaneus are in some sense parallel to the triple sacrifice of the *suovetaurilia*.[484] Overall, we can see Statius' conception of *pietas* at work in his construction of this overarching theme of lustration of the walls of Thebes. *Pietas* is both corrupted and sidelined in the action of Book 10. The sacrificial rituals of the *devotio* and the *lustratio* are debased and devalued, leaving the favourite of the gods, Menoeceus, and the despiser of the gods, Capaneus, equally important elements in the same pseudo-sacrificial context.

5. Conclusions.

A recent article by Dietrich has focused on book 12 of the *Thebaid* as a locus where *pietas* is transformed into a female value, opposed to the traditional philosophy of male heroism.[485] Such a reading is insightful, but perhaps underestimates how far *pietas* is transformed and how far this affects female displays of it. Statius creates a concept of *pietas* that is throughout the poem hugely complex, marked by fracture and division, difficult to pin down. Furthermore, we have already seen in one female display of *pietas* in Book 12, the burial of Polynices by Argia and Antigone, how much female *pietas* comes to resemble male *virtus*, while the following chapter will reveal equally disturbing features of female attempts to secure burial in Athens.

Pietas is undeniably important in the poem, the prevalence of the abstract and Statius' willingness to use a personification of the quality as a character at crucial moments in the narrative ensure that we as readers must consider its value in the moral questions that the poem poses. As a quality, it often seems irrelevant to the outcomes of the action in the epic; Pietas sits apart from both men and gods before her failed intervention as Eteocles and Polynices prepare to fight one another. At times it is difficult to distinguish from *virtus*;

[484] That the sacrifices are made to Apollo (10.762-3, 847), if any deity, rules out an exact parallel with a *suovetaurilia* which was only ever dedicated to Mars: see Oakley (1998) ad Livy 8.10.14.
[485] Dietrich (1999).

Hopleus and Dymas display a self-destructive level of *pietas*, while the narratives that deal with Coroebus and Menoeceus explicitly link *virtus* and *pietas* together. More alarmingly, *pietas* itself appears to have fractured nature, *pietas* can be directed in more than one direction, towards family, state and gods, and (one suspects in pointed contrast to Virgil's Aeneas) morally admirable characters in the poem have difficulty reconciling their duties to these various groups with one another. The myth of Linus and Coroebus reveals the fractured nature of *pietas* and in particular the lack of primacy of *pietas* towards morally reprehensible gods. Menoeceus' suicide reflects similar fracturing in the nature of *pietas*; the young man's actions can only cause a rupture between family and gods. Most disturbing of all, displays of *pietas* are linked with perverted religious rituals. Menoeceus' death is constructed as a failed attempt at *devotio*, and the failure is explicitly caused by the goddesses Virtus and Pietas. Furthermore, Menoeceus' death is linked with that of Capaneus in a bastardisation of lustration ritual that 'cleanses' Thebes. Returning to Pollmann's formulation at the beginning of this chapter, we can see that the categories of 'piety', that Menoeceus seemed to fit so comfortably, and 'anti-piety', whose supreme exponent was the atheist, giant-like Capaneus, have merged into one. In a structural sense, *pietas* and *impietas* cannot be separated in Statius' formulation. In an entire epic conflict corrupted by mutual fratricide and civil war, *pietas* collapses in upon itself. Its essential self-destructiveness results in its own ultimate irrelevance in a poem such as this; Pietas flees the battlefield, unable even to participate in the action. *Pietas* acts in parallel to the paradigmatic civil war state, turning in on itself.

Such a negative portrayal of *pietas*, especially towards the divine sphere, is troubling in an age characterised by renewed interest in religion and morality in all facets of the Roman Empire under Domitian. Two simple conclusions are possible. We can interpret the profoundly negative representation of *pietas*, both in connection with morally bankrupt divinities such as Apollo and Jupiter and the absence of moral authority in the poem, as a direct attack upon the religious, legislative and moral principles of Domitian, questioning the value of the regime equipped with 'ideology, moral fascism and a surfeit of vindictiveness'

through the subtle medium of mythological poetry, constructing a further opposition between an autocratic Domitian and a subversive Statius.[486] Such an approach seems heavy-handed however and is comfortably countered by an insistence on the separation of mythological poetry, especially this poem with its overarching context of *fraternae acies*, and imperial reality, born out of civil conflict, but progressing in a different direction. We must question the simplistic construction of Domitian and Statius and their actions and responses to one another. Such analytical positions have informed analysis of Flavian literature, history and culture for some time, with positions becoming increasingly entrenched and polarised, with a marked absence of dialogue between what each side sees as the other's excessive criticism and optimistic idealism.[487]

We saw that the opening and closing of the *Thebaid* work to create a sense of dialogue between Statius' poem and Domitian and a parallel dialogue between the *Thebaid* and the *Aeneid*. The latter dialogue informs Statius' construction of both *virtus* and *pietas*. We can see a profound reaction against the unity of Virgilian *pietas*, in particular as it is displayed by Aeneas.[488] This is more than subverting Virgilian *pietas* by placing it within a context explicitly of civil war. The nature of conflict within the *Thebaid* is considerably more complex, involving a central fraternal conflict that colours all other potentially morally acceptable conflicts that the poem depicts. Fracturing *pietas* becomes a reaction to and a comment upon Statius' most important model.[489] Yet it is a comment that clearly impacts upon the imperial ideology that elsewhere Statius is so keen to disseminate. It is neither reasonable to suggest a consistent subversion of Domitian's religious programme because of the markedly different context of Statius' epic, nor is it acceptable to suggest that Statius' poem does not speak to the contemporary world, nor that his profoundly disquieting

[486] The phrase is borrowed from Galinsky (2005), where it is used to criticise a similar approach towards Ovid. For such dichotomies, see Ahl (1986) esp. 2832-50; Dominik (1994) and Hill (1996) for a response.
[487] See Jones (1992) and Wilson (2003) for views from each side of the divide.
[488] For Statius' and Silius' reception of Virgil's concept of *pietas*, see Ripoll (1998) 275-6, 286-7; Delarue (2000) 80-3.
[489] We might see a parallel set of reactions to Virgil in the relative lack of importance of *pietas* in both Valerius and Silius.

portrayal of *pietas* has no bearing upon the ideology of which Statius' poetry forms a significant part.

The opening and closing passages discussed in chapter 1 suggest a dialogue between poet emperor parallel to the dialogue between *Thebaid* and *Aeneid*. Domitian's own religious festivals included significant elements of poetic performance and competition, and Statius competed both at the Alban and Capitoline games. This is a dialogue that Statius strives to continue in his later poetry.[490] *Silvae* 1.1 addresses emperor and people via the medium of ecphrasis, describing and delineating the imperial regime through its monuments. *Silvae* 4.2 addresses Domitian in the more private sphere of the imperial banquet, but again creates Domitian's public image. Statius strives to act as the public voice of his emperor. There can be no question that the theme of *pietas* in the *Thebaid* addresses the breakdowns in society and in relations between human and divine that occur in civil war. Yet Statius goes further than opposing positive and negative forms of *pietas* and constructing (as Lucan does with *virtus*) the principle that the context of civil war subverts and inverts *pietas*. Rather, *pietas* is split into tiny self-contradictory elements. The language of piety, duty and religiosity that formed a central element in Virgil's epic poem is no longer adequate to the task. The most unsettling feature of Statian *pietas* is its inability to distinguish between apparently polar opposites, such as Menoeceus and Capaneus, or Apollo and Coroebus. The differences between gods and men, pious and impious, faithful and faithless all disappear. The inadequacy of traditional epic language is a constant theme in Statian poetry, running through the undesirable nature of *virtus*, the irrelevance of *pietas* and for example into *Silvae* 4.2, where traditional epic language is viewed as inadequate to represent accurately the emperor's face or the magnificence of a banquet in his new palace.[491] Statius' construction of *pietas* is a radical deconstruction of Virgilian epic discourse.

Where does this leave Statius and Domitian? Statius acknowledges the potential for disquiet or even disapproval of Domitian's religious ideology but also looks to the future. In

[490] Hulls (forthcoming, 2007).
[491] Hulls (forthcoming, 2007).

the brave new Flavian world following the end of civil war, Rome needs the fresh emphasis on religion that Domitian is now attempting to provide by every means he can think of. Yet Statius recognises that Rome has been here before and that Domitian cannot merely (re)enact another Augustan 'cultural revolution'.[492] A fresh way of representing the empire of Domitian is required and a new vocabulary is a central part of this. Unlike the Augustan revolution, which explicitly involved the resurrection of ancient and obsolete customs and the continuation of the Republican past, Domitian's revolution involves a break with the past. Such a move benefits both poet and emperor; Statius will provide what Domitian's temple building and *ludi* cannot, in this instance a new way of looking at *pietas*. Indeed, Statius' *Thebaid* acts almost as an obituary for Virgilian *pietas*. Domitian's willingness to pave over the Augustan past allows an opportunity for Statius who can make himself the new epic voice for the regime.

[492] Cf. Wallace-Hadrill (1982); (1987); and esp. (1997); Zanker (1988).

CHAPTER 4

CLEMENTIA: EMPTY WORDS AND MERCIFUL MOTIVES

1. A shifting paradigm: notions of clementia *in imperial Rome.*

The third quality that is vitally important to the construction of the *Thebaid* is *clementia*. It assumes great importance in Book 12 when the Argive women go to the *ara Clementiae* at Athens in order to win Theseus' assistance in burying their husbands.[493] *Clementia* and the way in which we as readers understand it has a big impact on how we judge Theseus as a ruler, how we read closure in the poem, and indeed whether we can read any closure at all. As ever, the quality is generally used as a tool by scholars for analysing the character of Theseus in particular, before scholarly attitudes split into positive and negative camps (or the occasional pluralist interpretation).[494]

Much has been made in recent scholarship of the undoubted influence of Lucan's depiction of Caesarian *clementia* in his epic and Seneca's *de Clementia* upon Statius' presentation of *clementia* in the *Thebaid*. Yet, as this chapter will seek to demonstrate, the nature of *clementia* itself is difficult to pin down both in the poetic context of book 12 of the *Thebaid* and in the historical context of Statian *clementia* in Flavian Rome; Statius does not simply rework Lucan's highly critical attitude towards Caesarian *clementia* in a mythological context, nor is the strict Stoic philosophy of Seneca reproduced by Statius in epic form. We need to focus our attention upon this most arresting quality before we can understand its influence on our reading of other characters or on the poem's conclusion. It will also become apparent that the depiction of *clementia* in the *Thebaid* is closely linked to a wider ideology of *clementia* under the rule of Domitian, and we will compare Statius'

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[493] It is first mentioned explicitly by Oedipus following his sons' deaths, 11.606. Forms of *clementia* appear three times with the sense of placid weather or natural phenomena, 3.527, 5.485, 7.80, *OLD* s.v. *clementia* 2.

[494] For positive interpretations of Theseus, see Vessey (1973) 307-16; Braund (1996); Ripoll (1998). For negative appraisals see especially, Ahl (1986) 2894-8; Dominik (1994) 92-8 and on discordant aspects of his portrayal, see Hershkowitz (1998a) 296-301; Dietrich (1999). A more pluralist approach is best exemplified by Henderson (1991); (1993).

depiction of Domitian's *clementia* to the *clementia* of the *Thebaid*. Statius makes a more complex use of Seneca and Lucan than has previously been suggested and also incorporates wider ideas of *clementia* as it was presented in the ideologies of other emperors prior to Domitian, especially the emperor's elder brother Titus; we will also make a brief examination of the ideology of *clementia* during the reign of the emperor Tiberius, to whom Domitian is so frequently compared. We will see that these other representations of *clementia* are very different from those of Seneca and Lucan and that what we might term 'Flavian *clementia*' actually constructs itself in opposition to Seneca's Stoic *clementia*.

i. *Clementia* and Tiberius.

Clementia had a wider range of meaning than simply referring to the mercy of a ruler towards a subject or a victor to a conquered enemy. The adjective and adverb derived from *clementia* were used more loosely to mean 'kind' and 'gentle' both of people and especially of natural phenomena such as the weather.[495] This range of meaning is reflected in Statius' own usage (*Theb.* 3.527), but tends to be a background for the more narrowly defined quality of *clementia* as exercised by a person in power; Roman thought on *clementia* consistently links, as we shall see, the quality with the man exercising it, the mildness and gentleness of the man and regularly compares the wielder of *clementia* with Jupiter both in his guise as king of the gods and as the god of weather.[496] Thus the imagery surrounding *clementia* has strong affiliations with imagery of Jupiter and weather. Furthermore, the more narrowly defined quality exercised by those in power had always been used in Roman thought to indicate the mercy of judge or jury in punishing a criminal and by a victor in war over a defeated enemy.[497] Konstan has recently and effectively challenged the widespread

[495] *OLD* s.v. *clementia, clemens, clementer.* See Dowling (2006) 5-8.
[496] Cf. Sen. *Clem.* 1.7.1-3; more examples will be provided below.
[497] For judicial usages see Cic. *Verr.* 5.74; *Cluent.* 202; *Tul.* 50; *Part. Or.* 11; for military situations outside civil war, cf. Caes. *BG* 2.14; 2.31; 8.3; 8.21; Livy 3.2.5; 26.14.2; 28.25.13; 33.12.7; 36.12.6; 36.27.6; 37.6.6; 43.1.2; 45.4.7; 45.8.5; see also Ov. *Met.* 8.57; *Tr.* 2.125; 3.5.39; 4.4.53; 4.8.39; 4.9.3; 5.4.19; *Ex Pont.* 1.2.61; 2.2.121; 3.6.7. Suetonius situates Julius Caesar's *clementia* entirely in the

opinion that the exercise of *clementia* by one citizen towards another was generally viewed with resentment and regards *clementia*: 'not as a mark of haughtiness or disdain, but rather as a virtue and the sign of a humane temperament.'[498] Konstan's argument concerns Julius Caesar and the late Republic, but it is clear that *clementia* remained an attractive virtue for Rome's emperors; Augustus' *clementia* was celebrated on the *clipeus virtutis*, which praised his *virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia* and *pietas*.[499] *Clementia* was a virtue that autocratic Roman rulers remained keen to display.

This is certainly true for Tiberius, represented in the historical tradition as a tyrannical, dissimulating emperor to whom authors ancient and modern frequently compare Domitian. Tiberius continued the fiction of a restored Republic that his predecessor had worked so hard to maintain, but he also used *clementia* as a central element in his imperial ideology. Tiberius himself touted *clementia* as one of the important virtues of his principate, associating it with *moderatio* on coinage produced in the twenties, and also recognising its importance by consecrating an *ara Clementiae* in Rome in AD 28.[500] Clearly, Tiberius felt that displaying *clementia* would be a positive attribute rather than demeaning to the Roman people through subjugation to his autocracy. However, the exercise of *clementia* provided its own problems for the emperor, and in particular there was an inevitable conflict with another virtue that Tiberius wished to display, namely *iustitia*. Indeed, the display of *clementia* often conflicted with the proper dispensation of justice. Tacitus gives an account of the trial of Clutorius Priscus for the recitation of a poem during the illness of Tiberius' son, Drusus; Priscus hopes that, if Drusus should die, he would be financially rewarded by the emperor (*Ann.* 3.48-50). In the senate, the consul designate proposed that Priscus be executed, but Marcus Lepidus proposed a sentence of exile which ultimately failed as all but one of the senators voted for the consul designate's proposal:

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context of civil war, *Jul.* 75, and Augustus' *clementia* as the pardoning of political opponents, *Aug.* 51. Cf. Dowling (2006) esp. 18-28.

[498] See Konstan (2005) 337 and his summary of traditional opinion, pp. 337-9. On *clementia* generally, cf. esp. Adam (1970) 82-4; Weinstock (1971) 233-43; Burgess (1972); Dowling (2006).

[499] *RG* 34; Zanker (1988) fig. 79.

[500] See Dowling (2006) 170-80. Evidence of the deification of *clementia* is confined to the imperial period. On the altar to Clementia Caesaris, cf. Appian *BC* 2.106; Plut. *Caes.* 57.3; Dio 44.6.4.

sin flagitia et facinora sine modo sunt, suppliciis ac remediis principis moderatio maiorumque et vestra exempla temperant et vana a scelestis, dicta a malefaciis differunt, est locus sententiae per quam neque huic delictum impune sit et nos clementiae simul ac severitas non paeniteat. saepe audivi principem nostrum conquerentem, si quis sumpta morte misericordiam eius praevenisset.

(Tac. *Ann.* 3.50.2)

Lepidus' speech is interesting for its use of vocabulary, arguing that precedent and the emperor's moderation (*principis moderatio*, 3.50.2) should indicate a certain level of mitigation in punishing Priscus. Lepidus argues that a sentence of exile would represent *moderatio*, falling between harshness (*severitas*) and over-leniency (*clementia*, apparently synonymous with *misericordia*). Tacitus' account suggests that, in the Senate's eyes, a show of *clementia* would be undesirable, as it would involve failing to punish Priscus for his misdeeds. Tiberius' reaction to the outcome of the trial (3.51) reflects his desire to show at least *moderatio*, if not *clementia*: 'the result of the trial evidently displeased Tiberius...it is to Lepidus' points that he seems to concede greater force. For, if Lepidus was "a man after Tacitus' own heart", he also displays a *moderatio* which is arguably a counterpart to that of the emperor.'[501] Tiberius' exercising of justice at times had to override his desire to show *clementia*, and his reputation suffered as a result. This outcome is certainly ironic; Tiberius chose to display *clementia* precisely because he felt that it would augment his *fama*. This subtle irony is something that Tacitus eagerly exploits in his account of Tiberius' principate in the *Annals*; at the trial of Aemilia Lepida (*Ann.* 3.22), Tiberius is portrayed as inscrutable, showing signs of anger and indulgence (*adeo vertit ac miscuit irae et clementiae signa, Ann.* 3.22.2), while his leniency at the trial of C. Cominius is unusual, despite the obvious value of displays of *clementia* (*Ann.* 4.31). Tiberius is incapable of exercising *clementia* when he

[501] Woodman & Martin (1996) ad *Ann.* 3.48-51, quoting Häussler (1965) 282. Cf. also Tacitus' more ironic examples of Tiberius' *clementia* at *Ann.* 2.42; 5.6; 6.14 and Suet. *Tib.* 53.

would like, and clearly resents the political necessity to do so at other moments. As a result, his mercy is inconsistent and difficult to predict. These accounts of Tiberius' dispensations of justice reveal some of the complexity at work in the use of *clementia*. The display of *clementia* need not reflect inner feelings, but rather is used quite cynically by those who display it in order to augment their reputation.[502] Moreover, Tacitus cleverly weaves connections between Tiberius' cynical use of *clementia* and his tyrannical dissimulation of his true feelings (*vertit... miscuit... signa*).[503] Tacitus does not fail to miss an opportunity to damn Tiberius with the faintest praise; meanwhile Tiberius' *ara Clementiae* (*Ann.* 4.74.2) is presented in at best an ironic manner, at worst as a monumental irrelevance juxtaposed in Tacitus' history with Tiberius' tyrannical behaviour.[504]

The cynical nature of Tiberian *clementia* is perhaps best exemplified by the trial of C. Junius Silanus under charges of *maiestas* (*Ann.* 3.65-70), which Tacitus uses as an example of the damage done by Tiberius' tyrannical behaviour and the sycophancy of the Senate. *Clementia* becomes a weapon against Silanus when L. Calpurnius Piso makes a proposal that Silanus be banished to the barren island of Gyaros which begins with an extended eulogy of the emperor's mercifulness (*multum de clementia principis praefatus*, 3.68.2). Damage to the Roman state is now being done in the name of *clementia*.[505] An even more blatant example of this kind of corrupted *clementia* is visible in Suetonius' account of Tiberius' relationship with his daughter-in-law Agrippina (significantly the only mention of *clementia* in his life of Tiberius). After a long account of Tiberius' mistreatment of

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[502] Cf. Konstan (2005) 338. Tacitus shows *clementia* being used cynically and contrary to natural instincts both in his depiction of Corbulo considering whether to spare Tigranocerta and acquire a reputation for mercy, *Ann.* 14.23, esp. *clementiae famam adipisceretur*, and in his depiction of Civilis' and Classicus' decision not to plunder Colonia Agrippinensis, *Hist.* 4.63, esp. *utilis clementia fama*; cf. also *Hist.* 2.63. Such cynical manipulation becomes even more sinister because of the implicit comparison between Tiberius' *clementia* and these examples of individuals deciding whether to sack cities.

[503] On Tiberius' dissimulation, see e.g. Martin & Woodman (1989) ad *Ann.* 4.1.2 and the numerous examples they give.

[504] See Tac. *Ann.* 3.22.2 with Woodman & Martin (1996) *ad loc*; 4.31.2; 4.74.2 with Martin & Woodman (1989) *ad loc*.

[505] Note that when Tiberius lessens the sentence by sending Silanus to a less inhospitable island, his mercy is depicted in terms of *moderatio* with the phrase *prudens moderandi, si propria ira non impelleretur*, 3.69.5. The contrast with 3.22.2 is obvious and Tacitus clearly seeks to separate *moderatio* and *clementia*, cf. Woodman & Martin (1996) *ad loc*.

Agrippina, including ostracism, banishment and physical abuse that culminates in her death, *Tiberius takes credit for not having Agrippina strangled and forces the Senate to pass a* decree thanking him for his clemency:

> sed et perseuerantem atque ita absumptam criminosissime insectatus, cum diem quoque natalem eius inter nefastos referendum suasisset, imputauit etiam, quod non laqueo strangulatam in Gemonias abiecerit: proque tali clementia interponi decretum passus est, quo sibi gratiae agerentur et Capitolino Ioui donum ex auro sacraretur.
>
> *(Suet. Tib. 53.2)*

The damning accounts of Suetonius and Tacitus put a very negative spin on our reading of Tiberius' *clementia*. Yet a further complication presents itself, since our knowledge of Tiberian *clementia* comes almost exclusively through surviving coinage of the period and Tacitus' account, which typically ignores it altogether or diminishes its importance throughout. A brief analysis of the literature written under Tiberius reflects the *importance that clementia had in the ideology of his regime and the positive value that* contemporary authors placed upon that quality. Valerius Maximus devotes an entire section of his work on examples of *clementia* (*de Humanitate ac Clementia*, 5.1) reflecting the imperial ideology of the period. Furthermore, Velleius Paterculus gives a positive portrayal of Julius Caesar's *clementia* in the civil wars (2.50.4; 52.4-6; 56.1) and depicts Caesar's murder in terms of the *clementia* he had shown to others (2.57.1).[506] None of Velleius, Tacitus and Suetonius reveals any sense of disquiet in the deployment of that term in Tiberian ideology. Velleius is concerned to demonstrate that under Tiberius: 'Rome has *moved, not from Republic to Principate, but from Republic to a better Republic.*'[507] Furthermore, Tacitus and Suetonius are not concerned to demonstrate the autocracy that

[506] Cf. Woodman (1983) *ad loc*; Dowling (2006) 180-4.
[507] Gowing (2005) 43.

underpins Tiberius' *clementia* but rather criticise him for not employing that virtue on a consistent basis and for the way in which the exercise or rather the claim of *clementia* is corrupted by a tyrannical regime.[508] One can easily make the counter-claim that Velleius is a Tiberian apologist and propagandist and that, by the second century when Tacitus and Suetonius were writing, the autocratic nature of the principate was no longer debated or challenged. Yet it is important that neither author seems to see any problem in the actual display of *clementia* in Tiberius' 'better Republic'. *Clementia* is a value enshrined in Roman political ideology less than sixty years after the battle of Actium.

A number of conclusions present themselves. Perhaps the most crucial point to emerge is that no author reveals any sense of anxiety at the employment of *clementia* by Tiberius. Even his harshest critics fail to attack him for his use of an ideology based upon blatantly autocratic power. The two concepts of *iustitia* and *clementia*, while theoretically mutually beneficial, often act against one another, mercy often undermining the administration of justice and vice versa. Furthermore, the incorporation of *clementia* into imperial ideology is itself subject to unusual pressures; it is a quality that is subject to criticism whether applied or ignored. Moreover, the rhetoric of *clementia* can be manipulated with great ease; Tacitus directs his historical account of Tiberius so as almost to ignore or subvert his claims to *clementia*.[509] Finally, we should note how far the exercise of *clementia* can be divorced from innate feelings and personal instincts. *Clementia* is employed, quite cynically at times, to augment the *fama* of the emperor. Tacitus' narrative can combine these features of *clementia*, its often contradictory position with regard to true justice, the ability to manipulate *clementia* and its relationship with *fama* to demonstrate how Tiberius' tyrannical regime uses the ideology of *clementia* at its worst and most damaging moments.

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[508] See Martin & Woodman (1989) ad *Ann.* 4.31.2: 'T's handling of the conflict is here typical, since *meliorum* assumes that the exercise of *clementia* was morally preferable on every occasion, which cannot be the case in a society regulated by laws and punishments.' The emphasis is my own.
[509] Cf. Syme (1958) 387.

ii. Nero, Seneca and Lucan.

The attitudes towards *clementia* that we can see in the Tiberian period form the basis of Lucan's and Seneca's approach to *clementia* in the Neronian period.[510] Seneca's *de Clementia* provided what has been termed 'an ideological watershed' for Romans living under the principate, supplying a solid theoretical foundation upon which the young Nero could base his exercise of *clementia*.[511] Moreover, as Leigh has demonstrated, the strong criticism of Caesarian *clementia* in Lucan's epic is based upon the strict Stoic standards given in Seneca's *de Clementia*.[512] Inevitably, Statius' own understanding of *clementia* is mediated through Lucan's epic presentation, although as we shall see, it is not necessarily concordant with Lucan's or Seneca's vision. We shall for the sake of brevity focus our discussion on Seneca's treatise and refer to Lucan in passing although we should acknowledge from the outset the importance of Lucan's poem for Statius' depiction of *clementia*.

Neronian thought on *clementia* has developed the picture we have seen under Tiberius. Certainly, Seneca's portrayal of Nero's rule in the *de Clementia* no longer makes any pretence at a restored or improved Republic but makes Nero's kingship an unequivocal reality and the basis of his instruction and his discussion of *clementia*.[513] Although Nero is never referred to directly as *rex*, the frequency with which that word and its compounds and those powers associated with absolute kingship are used in Roman contexts in the *de Clementia* is at least a little surprising, especially given that, as Griffin comments: 'the view

[510] Both Caligula and Claudius invoked *clementia* in their own ideologies. Caligula set up a festival of *clementia* in AD 39 which climaxed in a sacrifice at the altar of *clementia*. Moreover, Caligula was praised by the Senate for his *clementia* and Claudius promised the Senate that they would enjoy it: see Dio 59.16.10; Josephus *AJ* 19.246; Dowling (2006) 189-94. However, both Nero's predecessors were noted for their cruelty, doubtless providing Seneca with an important motive for writing the *de Clementia* for the young Nero. *Clementia* also had a role in the Arval sacrifice to Nero in AD 66. See Weinstock (1971) 233-43; Burgess (1972) 339-42. On *clementia* in Lucan, see Leigh (1997) 53-68.
[511] The phrase is from Leigh (1997) 56. See Dowling (2006) 194-212.
[512] Leigh (1997) 53-68.
[513] See Griffin (1976), esp. 141-70.

of the principate set out in the *de Clementia* was basically acceptable to the reading public.'[514] However, this potentially awkward position that Seneca takes with regard to Nero is illustrated by Seneca's use of relationships more familiar to his Roman audience to explain the nature of the emperor's 'kingship' and his *clementia*. Seneca explains Nero's absolute power over the Roman people through two analogies. Nero is playing the role of the gods on earth (*Clem.* 1.1.2-4, cf. Nero as an all-powerful Jupiter, *Clem.* esp. 17.1-3, also 1.5.7, 1.8.5) and he is the *pater patriae*, who holds *patria potestas* over the Roman people.[515] Lucan uses the analogy between emperor and Jupiter in his depiction of Caesarian *clementia* by according Caesar the singularly Jovian epithet *serenus* as he dispenses mercy towards defeated enemies.[516] This epithet and the imagery that surrounds it are, as we shall see, used both by Martial and by Statius in their poetic depictions of Domitian.

Much as with Tacitus' presentation of Tiberius' *clementia* (which was doubtless influenced by Senecan thinking on the subject), Seneca bases his discussion of *clementia* around the exercise of justice, in particular the legal power of an absolute monarch. Yet Seneca's definition of *clementia* is difficult to pin down; the first book is more concerned with the instruction of Nero on good kingship, treating *clementia*, *misericordia*, *venia* and *ignoscere* as near synonyms, but the more philosophical second book of the *de Clementia* makes sharp distinctions between these terms, especially between *clementia* and *misericordia*.[517] Moreover, Leigh has demonstrated very clearly how Caesarian mercy is presented by Lucan as *venia* and not as strictly defined *clementia*, and this forms the basis of Lucan's criticism of Caesar.[518] Yet, as Griffin has shown, the apparent contradictions in the two books of Seneca's treatise can be reconciled with one another and we are left with a coherent portrayal of *clementia* not as something which is used to forgive wrongdoing, but

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[514] Griffin (1976) 141.
[515] On the first, see Fears (1975b), on the second see Adam (1970), and on the concept of *patria potestas*, cf. Crook (1967) 107-13. Nero is also compared to a slave master (*Clem.* 1.18) and a holder of the *corona civica* who spares his people (1.26.5): see Leigh (1997) 58 and n.39.
[516] See Leigh (1997) 56-63.
[517] See 1.1.4; 1.2.2; 1.6.2; 1.9.6; 1.10.1-4; 1.24.1 for synonyms. See 2.4.4; 2.5-6; 2.7 for distinctions. See also Griffin (1976) 152-8. Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 3.20-1 on the distinction between *misericordia* and *clementia*.
[518] Leigh (1997) 53-68.

rather a quality linked with rational Stoic *severitas*, and which, when used in a juridical context, guides the autocrat to pass the minimum possible punishment which the wrongdoer deserves:[519]

> si dixerimus clementiam esse moderationem aliquid ex merita ac debita poena remittentem: reclamabitur nullam virtutem cuiquam minus debito facere. atqui hoc omnes intellegunt clementiam esse, quae se flectit citra id, quod merito constitui posset.
>
> (Sen. *Clem.* 2.3.2)

Indeed, Seneca even prefers *clementia* to *severitas*, suggesting that men can be reformed and that *clementia* is a policy to be followed consistently (*Clem.* 1.2.1-2); a mild *princeps* was one to whom his subjects were more obedient (*Clem.* 1.22-4), but acts of forgiveness and indulgence are not part of the Senecan programme; rather, appropriate and consistent punishment is central to Seneca's vision. However, Seneca's idealised vision of *clementia* is dependent upon the good nature of the emperor. As Leigh puts it: 'the acts of forgiveness and the acts of brutality are two sides of the same absolutist coin. All depends on the emperor's whim and mood.'[520] Nero became increasingly brutal and unpredictable as his reign progressed, and an example of *clementia* from Tacitus illustrates the subtle differences between the Tiberian and Neronian periods. In AD 62 a trial for *maiestas*, the first of Nero's reign, was brought against Antistius Sosianus (*Ann.* 14.48-9), and Tacitus' account of the trial bears a striking resemblance to that of Clutorius Priscus under Tiberius (*Ann.* 3.48-51). Antistius too gave a recitation of some dangerous and regrettable verses and was charged with treason. The majority of witnesses confirmed this and the consul designate proposed that Antistius be executed. The sentence was generally accepted by the senators, but Thrasea

[519] Griffin (1976) 155-61. On the importance of Cic. *Off.* 1.88, which may itself be indebted to Panaetius, see Griffin (1976) 166-7. Note especially the importance of justice in both authors and Cicero's specific application of *clementia* to a man who can fix penalties in administering justice.
[520] Leigh (1997) 68.

Paetus argued that Antistius should be banished and his property confiscated. The difference from the story of Priscus is that Thrasea's argument persuaded most of his fellow-senators and Nero reluctantly agreed to the milder punishment:

> P. Mario L. Afinio consulibus Antistius praetor, quem in tribunatu plebis licenter egisse memoravi, probrosa adversus principem carmina factitavit vulgavitque celebri convivio dum apud Ostorium Scapulam epulatur. exim a Cossutiano Capitone, qui nuper senatorium ordinem precibus Tigellini soceri sui receperat, maiestatis delatus est. tum primum revocata ea lex; credebaturque *haud perinde exitium Antistio quam imperatori gloriam quaeri, ut condemnatum* a senatu intercessione tribunicia morti eximeret. et cum Ostorius nihil audivisse pro testimonio dixisset, adversis testibus creditum; censuitque Iunius Marullus consul designatus adimendam reo praeturam necandumque more maiorum. ceteris inde adsentientibus Paetus Thrasea, multo cum honore Caesaris et acerrime increpito Antistio, non quidquid nocens reus pati mereretur, id egregio sub principe et nulla necessitate obstricto senatui statuendum disseruit: carnificem et laqueum pridem abolita et esse poenas legibus constitutas quibus *sine iudicum saevitia et temporum infamia supplicia decernerentur. quin in* insula publicatis bonis quo longius sontem vitam traxisset, eo privatim miseriorem et publicae clementiae maximum exemplum futurum.
>
> (Tac. *Ann.* 14.48)

Tacitus' repetition of an extremely similar story with only minor variation in the details clearly invites a comparison between the two.[521] Furthermore, Thrasea's long eulogy of Nero, *multo cum honore Caesaris*, should also be seen as a parallel to Calpurnius Piso's long introduction to his speech proposing exile at *Ann.* 3.68.2. Tacitus may suggest that

[521] Both Tacitean narratives themselves are based upon Sallust's account of the trial of the Catilinarian conspirators, *Cat.* 50-5. See Griffin (1976) 162-3; Woodman & Martin (1996) 357-9.

Thrasea's speech is a more positive, Stoic use of *clementia* while Piso's is a cynical and sycophantic invocation of *clementia* but the choice of comparand is also unflattering to Thrasea. The subtle differences between Priscus' trial and those of Antistius and Silanus lie in the use of *clementia* in this passage. Thrasea's argument is clearly (and unsurprisingly) in accord with Senecan principles. Antistius deserves the worst but the Senate need not, and indeed should not, inflict the worst punishment available (*quidquid nocens reus pati mereretur*). Thrasea persuades the Senate to impose a sentence entirely in accordance with the Senecan ideal of *clementia*. What is fascinating is that Nero's response, itself characterised by a mixture of emotions reminiscent of Tiberius (*ille inter pudorem et iram cunctatus*, 14.49, cf. 3.22.2), assigns different terminology to describe the change of sentence:

> ille inter pudorem et iram cunctatus, postremo rescripsit nulla iniuria provocatum Antistium gravissimas in principem contumelias dixisse; earum ultionem a patribus postulatam et pro magnitudine delicti poenam statui par fuisse. ceterum se, qui severitatem decernentium impediturus fuerit, moderationem non prohibere: statuerent ut vellent, datam et absolvendi licentiam.
>
> (Tac. *Ann.* 14.49)

Nero calls the lessening of the sentence *moderatio* and the original proposal *severitas*, while affirming that it is for the Senate to propose a penalty (*pro magnitudine delicti poena*) but that it is the emperor's prerogative alone to grant *clementia*. Nero uses the terminology that was used in the trial of Priscus under Tiberius while Thrasea uses Seneca's terminology. Nero's response reads as if he has entirely misunderstood the import of Thrasea's speech, where the reduction of sentence is an act of *clementia*. Moreover, Nero apparently latches onto Thrasea's phrase *publicae clementiae*, insisting that only letting Antistius off entirely would constitute *clementia* and that such a decision could only be

made by the emperor. Tacitus' account of this trial illustrates a number of key points in the use of *clementia* under Nero. There are two different notions of *clementia* at work in the exchange between Thrasea and Nero, one a Stoic philosophical concept which can comfortably be identified with *clementia* in Seneca's treatise and Lucan's epic,[522] and the other a concept that was used by Nero and is identifiable with the notion of *clementia* in operation under Tiberius. The opposition between competing models of *clementia* becomes only more ironic when one considers that Seneca's treatise was directed at the emperor first and foremost; Nero has not learned his lesson, and Tacitus chooses the first *maiestas* trial of his reign as an apposite moment to demonstrate this. That Thrasea's proposal proves persuasive even in the face of imperial opposition may indicate that Tacitus believes that Thrasea invokes a superior notion of *clementia* to Nero. Yet the obvious parallels between Thrasea's speech and that of Calpurnius Piso in *Annals* 3 suggest that Thrasea's participation in the first *maiestas* trial of Nero's reign does not result in unmitigated glory. Thrasea too wields *clementia* with one eye on his reputation as a hardened Stoic (*Thrasea sueta firmitudine animi et ne gloria intercideret*, 14.49).

The Neronian Stoics, represented by Seneca, Lucan and Tacitus' Thrasea can be seen to create and employ a rival definition of *clementia* to the one at work under the earlier Julio-Claudian emperors. One gets the impression that Seneca manipulated *clementia*, shifting it from the 'common usage' sense often synonymous with concepts such as *misericordia* or *venia*, and thus potentially unacceptable to his audience, to a highly refined concept that was easier to swallow. Thus the strict Stoic sense of *clementia* becomes much closer to the notion of *severitas*. However, this Stoic notion of *clementia* was not universally accepted. This redefinition of *clementia* is markedly different from the one that Tacitus would later employ in his presentation of Tiberius' juridical employment of that virtue. Moreover, Tacitus makes the difference between these two ideas of *clementia* the basis of the opposition between Thrasea and Nero at the trial of Antisitius. Nonetheless, this Stoic

[522] Tacitus also makes strong identifications between Seneca and Thrasea through their suicides, *Ann.* 15.62-4, 16.34-5: see Hill (2004) 180-7.

idea is political and philosophical theory grounded in the realities of the Roman world; Seneca's doctrine relies entirely on the good character of the man wielding power. Tacitus' evaluation of Thrasea's display of Stoic *clementia* is guarded. Thrasea displays many of the undesirable characteristics of a wielder of *clementia* himself.

iii. Titus and 'Flavian *clementia*'.

Senecan views on *clementia* did not continue unchanged into the Flavian period. Flavian ideology targeted Vespasian's civil war opponent Vitellius for most abuse, but Vespasian also showed particular affection for the emperor Claudius, combining a desire to show gratitude for his own advancement under Claudius with a suggestion of continuity with the Julio-Claudian regime, with the added benefit that the new Flavian dynasty could build a foundation for itself by denigrating Nero.[523] The tradition of Nero as tyrant and monster was to a considerable extent a literary invention and doubtless owes much to pro-Flavian historians such as Pliny, Cluvius and Fabius.[524] Otho's and Vitellius' desire to suggest themselves as legitimate successors to Nero imply that he was still a popular figure in AD 69.[525] It was Vespasian's propaganda that established Nero as tyrannical monster. This feature of early Flavian propaganda continued as a dominant theme in the reign of Titus and literary, religious and monumental expressions of his ideology came together to define the new regime as the polar opposite of the tyrannical Nero in particular, as Martial illustrates:

hic ubi sidereus propius videt astra colossus

[523] See Griffin (2000a) 11-25. Vitellius also used *clementia* on his coinage, and a Vitellian coin provides our earliest surviving representation of Clementia, a seated female figure holding sceptre and branch. Such a representation appears to have been typical for female personifications of virtues. For the coin, see Weinstock (1971) plate 19.3; for coins with the inscription *clementiae*, see Sutherland (1951) 193-4; Dowling (2006) 213-14. For an unflattering portrayal of a tyrannical emperor wielding *clementia*, see *cunctis clementiam laudantibus, coram interfici iussit, velle se dicens pascere oculos*, Suet. *Vit.* 14.

[524] The earliest evidence for the tradition of an evil Nero is Jos. *BJ* 2.250-1 Niese, published c. AD 75.

[525] Otho acclaimed as *Nero Otho*, Tac. *Hist.* 1.78; for Otho's use of this name elsewhere, cf. Plut. *Otho* 3.2; Suet. *Otho.* 7.1; Dio 64.6. Otho also re-erected statues of Poppaea and started to enlarge the *domus aurea*. Vitellius offered sacrifices to the shade of Nero, Tac. *Hist.* 2.95; Suet. *Vit.* 11; Eutrop. 7.18. On favourable sources, see Jos. *BJ* 4.9.2; Paus. 7.17.3; 9.27.4; Griffin (1984) 235-7.

et crescunt media pegmata celsa via,
invidiosa feri radiabant atria regis
unaque iam tota stabat in urbe domus.
hic ubi conspicui venerabilis Amphitheatri
erigitur moles, stagna Neronis erant.
hic ubi miramur velocia munera thermas,
abstulerat miseris tecta superbus ager.
Claudia diffusas ubi porticus explicat umbras,
ultima pars aulae deficientis erat.
reddita Roma sibi est et sunt te praeside, Caesar,
deliciae populi, quae fuerant domini.

(Martial *de Spectaculis* 2)

Martial's poem depicts the demolishing of Nero's *domus aurea* and its replacement by the temple of Divus Claudius, the building of the Colosseum on the site of Nero's lake, and the replacement of a colossal statue of Nero with a statue of the Sun.[526] Flavian architecture and pre-Neronian restoration efface the excesses of Nero's reign. Public building replaces luxurious private palace in accordance with Republican traditions.[527] However, it is the symbolic value of Flavian re-building that is remarkable here. Vespasian's new dynasty predicates itself on its opposition to a Nero who is constructed in Flavian ideology as the ultimate tyrant (cf. *invidiosa regis*). Blatant acceptance of kingship (the starting point for Seneca's *de Clementia*) is rejected by Martial and replaced by a rhetoric of restoration (*reddita Roma sibi est*) much closer to Tiberius' ideology of a better Republic. Flavian architecture stages the redeployment of power away from the tyrannical individual to the state under the new Caesar's guidance.

[526] The baths of Titus covered the site of Nero's palace and park further to the north on the Oppian hill and many of the works of art housed within Nero's palace were displayed publicly in the Temple of Peace, itself built on land left empty after the fire of 64: see Pliny *NH* 34.84; 36.27.
[527] For the Republican tradition, see Cic. *Flac.* 28; *Mur.* 76.

The obvious desire under Vespasian to oppose the tyrannical Nero whilst maintaining, through connections with Claudius, apparent links with Julio-Claudian Rome was increased when Titus came to power. Flavian ideology redefines the nature of imperial power, figuring Titus as a presiding presence (*te praeside, Caesar*) in a restored Roman state rather than a blatantly autocratic ruler. Moreover, Titus is defined in contrast to Nero not only for the same reasons as his father, but also because, in the public gaze, he appeared similar to the young Nero in many respects. The emperor was brought up in the courts of Claudius and Nero, and displayed predilections for poetry and public speaking, and a love of shameless carousing that prompted comparisons with Rome's last young emperor.[528] Titus worked hard to alter his reputation, emphasising his friendship with Britannicus and casting aside his dissolute image.[529] Worse still, Titus had also acquired a reputation for cruelty during the Jewish war, a reputation that Josephus sought to recast by emphasising Titus' clemency.[530] The combination of Titus' public image before his accession to power as dilettante, poet, and cruel soldier was deeply unsettling in Rome.[531]

As a result of this public perception, Titus fought hard to achieve a reputation for *clementia* and to make his *clementia* a centrepiece of his ideology.[532] Suetonius records that Titus accepted the position of *pontifex maximus* as a safeguard against his ever taking the life of a citizen and that after this time he was never directly or indirectly responsible for a murder.[533] Furthermore, Titus refused to accept charges of defamation of the imperial house (*asebeia*) and refused to allow such cases in any court.[534] Titus even banned all capital cases against senators and swore not to bring these to trial elsewhere.[535] Suetonius illustrates Titus'

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[528] Suet. *Tit.* 2-3; 7; Dio 66.15-18; cf. Pliny's praise for Titus' oratorical and literary skills, *NH* 1 *praef.* 5; 1 *praef.* 11; 2.22; 2.89.
[529] Tacitus saw a resemblance to Vespasian in that both father and son improved on becoming emperor, Tac. *Hist.* 2.2.
[530] See Yavetz (1975); cf. Suet. *Tit.* 6-7.1; Dio 66.24.4.
[531] For suggestions Vespasian's advisers may have reconsidered Titus' suitability for power: see Griffin (2000a) 45. It was probably in order to help with this 'image change' that Titus dismissed Berenice, see Suet. *Tit.* 7; Griffin (2000a) 48.
[532] See Griffin (2000a) 51-2.
[533] Suet. *Tit.* 9.1.
[534] Dio 66.19.1-2.
[535] Tac. *Hist.* 4.41. Titus inevitably garnered a great deal of senatorial approval: see Dio 67.2.4.

clementia with a story of two patricians condemned in the Senate for an attempt to take power but pardoned by Titus:

> pontificatum maximum ideo se professus accipere ut puras seruaret manus, *fidem praestitit, nec auctor posthac cuiusquam necis nec conscius, quamuis* interdum ulciscendi causa non deesset, sed periturum se potius quam perditurum adiurans. duos patricii generis convictos in adfectatione imperii nihil amplius quam ut desisterent monuit, docens principatum fato dari, si quid praeterea desiderarent promittens se tributurum. et confestim quidem ad alterius matrem quae procul aberat, cursores suos misit, qui anxiae salvum filium nuntiarent, ceterum ipsos non solum familiari cenae adhibuit, sed et insequenti die gladiatorum spectaculo circa se ex industria conlocatis oblata sibi *ferramenta pugnantium inspicienda porrexit. dicitur etiam cognita utriusque* genitura imminere ambobus periculum adfirmasse, uerum quandoque et ab alio, sicut euenit.
>
> (Suetonius *Titus* 9.1-2)[536]

Suetonius doubtless embellished the truth behind this story, and we should note in particular the similar story told by Dio of the conspiracy of the praetorian C. Calpurnius Crassus Frugi Licinianus against Domitian's successor Nerva. Dio claims that Nerva invited both conspirator and those who denounced him to sit beside him at the games and inspect swords for sharpness, thus demonstrating Nerva's *clementia*. The near identical details in both narratives suggest that such tales may form part of a 'good emperor' *topos* or that Dio reworked Suetonius' account in his own. The reigns of Nerva and Titus bear close comparison; both ruled for only two years following the death without issue of a tyrannical predecessor and both were noted in their brief reigns for their *clementia*.[537] Nonetheless, this

[536] Cf. Aur.Vict. *Caes.* 10.3.
[537] Dio 68.3; Cf. Griffin (2000b) 87-92.

story reflects Titus' employment of *clementia* as a consistent policy and his willingness to show it in the face of extreme provocation. Initial reactions suggest that Titus was taking the place that Seneca had set up for his protégé Nero: 'Titus had taken a step towards fulfilling the ideal of the philosopher-king as interpreted by Seneca in *De Clementia*.'[538]

Elsewhere, Dio's history concludes its narrative of Titus by remembering the posthumous assessment of his reign and drawing a rather odd comparison between Titus and Augustus that clearly uses the *de Clementia* as a model; Titus as emperor is compared to Augustus in a way which clearly evokes Seneca's comparison of Nero to Augustus in the *de Clementia*. The comparison undercuts Titus' legacy, suggesting that he, like Nero, started his reign well and that his reputation for clemency is preserved only because he died young:[539]

> ἁμαρτίαν τινὰ αὐτῷ ἐγγενέσθαι. δύο τε γὰρ ἔτη μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ μῆνας δύο ἡμέρας τε εἴκοσιν ἔζησεν ἐπ' ἐννέα καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτεσι καὶ μησὶ πέντε καὶ ἡμέραις πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι. καὶ αὐτὸν ἐξ ἴσου κατὰ τοῦτο τῇ τοῦ Αὐγούστου πολυετίᾳ ἄγουσι, λέγοντες ὅτι οὔτ' ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἐφιλήθη ποτὲ εἰ ἐλάττω χρόνον ἐζήκει, οὔτ' ἂν οὗτος εἰ πλείονα, ὁ μὲν ὅτι τραχύτερος κατ' ἀρχὰς διά τε τοὺς πολέμους καὶ διὰ τὰς στάσεις γενόμενος ἠδυνήθη μετὰ ταῦτα εὐεργεσίαις ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ λαμπρύνεσθαι, ὁ δ' ὅτι ἐπιεικῶς ἄρξας ἐν ἀκμῇ τῆς δόξης ἀπέθανε, τάχα ἂν ἐλεγχθείς, εἴγε ἐπὶ μακρὸν ἐβεβιώκει, ὅτι εὐτυχίᾳ πλείονι ἢ ἀρετῇ ἐχρήσατο.
>
> (Dio 66.18.4-5)[540]

The comparison is a deliberately awkward one; Titus is like the long-lived Augustus precisely because he died young. There was an obvious opportunity to draw a much more favourable parallel with Titus' predecessor by evoking Titus' own public image of harshness

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[538] Griffin (2000a) 52.

[539] A similar implication is cast by the final sentence of Suetonius' biography, *quod ut palam factum est, non secus atque in domestico luctu maerentibus publice cunctis, senatus prius quam edicto convocaretur ad curiam concurrit, obseratisque adhuc foribus, deinde apertis, tantas mortuo gratias egit laudesque congessit, quantas ne vivo quidem umquam atque praesenti.* Suet. *Tit.* 11.

[540] Cf. *Clem.* 1.9; for Dio's knowledge of this passage, see Dio 55.14-22.1.

which he gained during the civil war of 69 and especially the Jewish War.[541] Instead his memory is spun in the opposite direction, linking him to the youthful Nero and the doubtless familiar text of the *de Clementia*.[542] The implication is that Titus was not moving away from tyranny but towards it. Yet Dio's comment illustrates that the grounds for comparison through *clementia* do not fit perfectly. Titus' *clementia* is very different from the Stoic philosophical ideal that Seneca champions in the *de Clementia*, especially in the second book of that text. Applying strict Senecan terminology to the situation that Suetonius describes reveals that Titus is not exercising the Senecan ideal of *clementia* at all. The two patricians have been convicted for their crime (*convictos in adfectatione imperii*) and Titus had reason to punish them (note the nod towards arbitrary or even tyrannical power in Suetonius' choice phrase *ulciscendi causa*) and, according to Seneca at least, *should* have punished them. Titus' actions would not be, according to the Senecan model of *clementia*, a display of *clementia* at all but rather an act of *venia*.[543] Yet Titus' reign is remembered by contemporaries as one characterised by *clementia* (however much the shortness of his reign cast a favourable light on his reputation). The young emperor displays mercy of the kind that Tacitus remembers occurring all too rarely under Tiberius, mercy that was granted unquestioningly and automatically.

Seneca's *de Clementia* remained a familiar text throughout the Flavian period; Dio's familiarity with that text and his invocation of Seneca's text in his evaluation of Titus suggests that the *de Clementia* remained an important yardstick in the appraisal of rulers and their behaviour. We cannot simply aver that Seneca was being ignored. Yet Seneca's work was seen in the Flavian period as the product of a corrupt, excessive, tyrannical episode in Roman history; it was in opposition to Neronian Rome that both Vespasian and Titus constructed their own ideology. The *de Clementia* was a central element in Seneca's

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[541] For this reputation, see Suet. *Tit.* 6-7; Dio 66.24.4. However, Titus is generally remembered as popular and his posthumous reputation was undoubtedly improved by his brother's descent into tyranny. Dio implies that had Titus lived he would have followed the same path as Domitian.

[542] This might also seem slightly awkward given that the sense of youthfulness is stretched almost to breaking point by comparing the teenage Nero and the forty-one year old Titus, Dio 66.18.4.

[543] As such his actions mirror the 'false *clementia*' that Lucan's Caesar displays: see Leigh (1997) 53-68.

education of the young Nero, and as such, the text presents undeniable difficulties for the Flavian audience. Moreover, the Flavian period was one characterised by philosophical and especially Stoic opposition to all three Flavian emperors, whose reigns were marked with expulsions and executions of prominent philosophers. We might even postulate, although such a theory would be impossible to prove, that the expulsions of philosophers by Vespasian in AD 71 and 75 may have created an anti-philosophical climate affecting the way in which Stoic texts such as the *de Clementia* were read. On assuming power in 79, Titus worked hard to create a dominant image of himself as an emperor characterised by *clementia* (the sense of cynical manipulation of *clementia* lies behind this). Yet his version of *clementia* differed in a number of important respects from the Senecan ideal; *clementia* was no longer associated with *severitas* but was milder, and usually involved a removal of or significant lessening of punishment against legal precedent. Such a notion of *clementia* is consistent with the 'over-lenient' *clementia* that Lepidus identifies at *Annals* 3.50 and what Seneca himself might have termed *misericordia* or *venia*. Furthermore, Titus employed this style of mercy as a consistent policy in judicial affairs; *clementia* was an automatic response from Titus, not the product of deliberation in individual cases. Titus even exercised his brand of *clementia* towards Musonius Rufus by recalling him from exile, which may have indicated an intention towards a wider reconciliation with the philosophers, and certainly ought to be considered as a mirror-image of the exchange between Thrasea Paetus and Nero in *Annals* 14; this time it is the emperor and not Stoic who exercises the dominant form of *clementia*.[544] Seneca's Stoic brand of *clementia* was neither forgotten nor misunderstood in the Flavian period. Flavian ideology surrounding *clementia* still contains many Senecan elements; significantly the imagery connecting the emperor wielding *clementia* with Jupiter remains a dominant image in the Flavian period while the looser definitions of *clementia* that Seneca employed in Book 1 of the *de Clementia* are much closer to the Flavian ideal. Yet significant differences remain; Seneca's model was no longer the ideal and 'Flavian *clementia*' has a distinct and different feel from its Stoic counterpart.

[544] See *Griffin (2000a)* 45, 52.

2. Clementia *in Statius: Domitian, Athens and the father of Claudius Etruscus.*

Unsurprisingly, Domitian also used the virtue of *clementia* in his own ideology. Early in Domitian's reign, Martial invokes the quality in a cycle of poems about lions where he attributes *clementia* to Domitian (1.6; 14; 22; 48; 51; 60; 104).[545] The lion, most powerful of all the animals, shows a miraculously mild and merciful attitude towards its doomed prey. This miracle is obviously as a result of the divine presence of the emperor. Martial uses his descriptions of wild animals to illustrate the nature of his emperor, whose character is the opposite of the untamed tyrant,[546] while the weaker animals represent the emperor's subjects.[547] Wild animals spontaneously abandon their natural ferocity and seek to emulate his goodness and *clementia* (*haec clementia non paratur arte*, 1.104.21).[548] Flavian thinking on *clementia* and the Senecan treatise also maintain a pervasive influence over the *Octavia*, a play that recent scholarship has dated to Domitian's reign.[549] The play certainly works in accordance with Flavian propagandistic attitudes towards Nero and Claudius, celebrating Octavia, the last member of the Claudian family (as well as Britannicus and Claudius himself) and condemning Nero as a murderous, monstrous tyrant. As Ferri's recent commentary on the *Octavia* makes clear, the play reinterprets Seneca's *de Clementia* as: 'a courageous entreaty to Nero to act forbearingly, to behave according to clemency.'[550] The portrayal of Seneca in the *Octavia* is apologetic; the politically astute Seneca of Tacitus' history who has a decisive hand in the murders of Britannicus and Agrippina is transformed

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[545] See Howell (1980) *ad loc*; Rosati (2006) 43-6, esp. on the emperor as *Magna Mater*, and the symbolic intentions of the organisers of games.
[546] Cf. la Penna (1980) 10-11.
[547] Nauta (2002) 410-11.
[548] Cf. Citroni (1975) 320; Rosati (2006) 51-2; Mart. 9.79.5-8 on the inspired mildness of the emperor's court.
[549] Harrison (2003) to AD 83/4; Ferri (2003) 17-27 to around AD 90. Ferri's arguments that the author of *Octavia* drew on *Silv.* 1.2, composed in 89/90 AD and that the play relates to Domitian's attempts to divorce Domitia (cf. Dio 67.3.1; Griffin (2000a) 67 and n.328; Ferri (2003) 27) are quite compelling. The *Octavia* would thus have been composed at almost the same time as Statius wrote book 12 of the *Thebaid* and if Ferri's theory, (2003) 26, that Statius and the play's author were connected through the circle of Polla Argentaria is correct then we should assume that the poets exchanged ideas.
[550] Ferri (2003) 70, see esp. 70-5 on this. Cf. also Manuwald (2002).

into a decent old man, tellingly loyal to Claudius' memory (*Oct.* 587), eager to speak the *truth and educate his pupil and is idealised in most respects.*[551] *Similarly, the Octavia* presents a transformed version of Seneca's views on Nero's power in the *de Clementia* and Ferri has noticed in particular the tendency in the *Octavia* for Seneca to restrain the emperor's power as far as possible and couch it in terms of popular acclamation, *concensus* and not divine sanction.[552] Yet in parallel to the revisionist presentation of Seneca as philosopher and counsellor is a revision of the *clementia* that he encourages Nero to use. The first explicit mention of *clementia* (a quality which Seneca himself never discusses in his plays) comes in the exchange between Nero and Seneca:

> N: iusto esse facile est cui vacat pectus metu.
>
> S: magnum timoris remedium clementia est.
>
> N: extinguere hostem maxima est virtus ducis.
>
> S: servare cives maior est patriae patri.
>
> N: praecipere mitem convenit pueris senem.
>
> *(Oct. 441-4)*

Ostensibly this is a confrontation between a stereotypical tyrant (note Nero's fear) and a wise counsellor. Seneca invokes the imagery of the *de Clementia* in referring to Nero as *pater patriae.* Yet the nature of the *clementia* has changed from the real Seneca's exposition in his treatise. The Seneca of the play advocates something rather closer to Titus' notion of *clementia*, universally applied and protective of all citizens no matter what their offence against the emperor; the role of *clementia* is to protect citizens (*servare cives*). Seneca later makes similar statements concerning the ideal ruler who watches over the fatherland, protects his citizens, and gives peace to the world (*consulere patriae, parcere*

[551] Cf. e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 13.5; 14.7; 14.54.
[552] Ferri (2003) 73-4. He also notes that Seneca plays the role of *satelles* and not Stoic martyr. The tradition of the heroic philosopher opposing the tyrant in the face of death is a separate one which we will examine in chapter 5.

afflictis, fera | caede abstinere, tempus atque irae dare, | orbi quietem, saeculo pacem suo, Oct. 473-5).[553] Nero's response to Seneca's suggestions is telling:

> servare cives principi et patriae graves,
> claro tumentes genere quae dementia est,
> cum liceat una voce suspectos sibi
> mori iubere?
>
> (*Oct.* 495-8)

Both Nero and Seneca clearly understand *clementia* in terms of sparing all citizens, even if they are dangerous to the person of the emperor. Nero's quip *quae dementia est* is surely a rather unsubtle pun on the similar sounding *clementia* and Nero's words repeat the line beginning of 443 and the line ending of 442. For Nero, the *clementia* of a ruler such as Titus is madness. Furthermore, Nero later laments the inability of the rioting Roman people to understand his brand of mercy (*nec capit clementiam | ingrata nostram, ferre nec pacem potest*, 835-6). A careful reader of Seneca might recognise in this the true Senecan *clementia* so closely linked with *severitas*. The *Octavia* makes a revisionist presentation not just of Seneca but also of his philosophy. Like Flavian thinking on the subject of *clementia*, the play maintains much of the imagery of the power of the emperor (the emperor as *pater patriae*) but the substance of the quality is transformed. *Octavia*'s Seneca presents a Flavian ideal of mercy, while the tyrannical Nero presents a harsher form much closer in flavour to the real Seneca's conception.

Statius praises Domitian for his *clementia* twice in the *Silvae* in poems written, if modern dating is correct, soon after the publication of the *Octavia*.[554] Statius praises

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[553] Cf. Ferri (2003) ad 473 for the evocation of *Aen.* 6.853. Note also how Seneca is described as *mitem*, 445, an epithet which becomes hugely important for Domitian wielding *clementia*. We should also include *orbi quietem*, 475, in this complex of imagery.

[554] These poems were of course published after the *Thebaid*, most likely in AD 93: see Coleman (1988) xvii.

Domitian for allowing the father of his patron, Claudius Etruscus, to return from exile in Campania; this is the same *clementia* Domitian shows towards defeated enemies in war:

> nec longa moratus
> *Romuleum reseras iterum, Germanice, limen*
> maerentemque foves inclinatosque penates
> erigis. haud mirum, ductor placidissime, quando
> haec est quae victis parcentia foedera Cattis
> quaeque suum Dacis donat clementia montem,
> quae modo Marcomanos post horrida bella vagosque
> Sauromatas Latio non est dignata triumpho.
>
> (*Silv.*3.3.164-71)[555]

The build-up to this passage already deploys the imagery of emperor as Jupiter; Etruscus' father anticipates a lightning bolt from the emperor but is spared and Domitian only deploys thunder and a gentle storm (3.3.158-60).[556] Yet Domitian's *clementia* occurs in a rather different context from the examples we have examined thus far. His *clementia* is exercised towards foreign peoples after they have been conquered in battle.[557] Domitian's exploits are cleverly played up; his fighting against the Marcomani and Sarmatians is described as *horrida bella*, a phrase that Statius uses on occasion in the *Thebaid*, but arguably evokes more strongly its uses in the *Aeneid* during the Sibyl's prophecy of Book 6 and the second proem at the beginning of Book 7.[558] Yet Statius subtly undercuts the

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[555] Shackleton Bailey (2003) 213 tellingly translates *ductor placidissime* as 'most merciful of rulers'.
[556] See below, p.210 on these lines. Dio 67.1 demonstrates the importance of the lightning imagery in describing Domitian 'attacking people with the sudden violence of a thunderbolt'.
[557] The historical reality of these conflicts was rather different from the way in which they are depicted here: see Mattern (1999) 92-3; Griffin (2000a) 64-5 and n.314; chapter 2 above. More will be said of Domitian and Etruscus' father below, p.209.
[558] Cf. the Sibyl's prophecy, *bella, horrida bella*, at *Aen.* 6.86; the second proem, *dicam horrida bella*, *Aen.* 7.41. The phrase occurs three times in the *Thebaid*, 4.601; 6.457; 6.864, see Lovatt (2005) 29, 204-5, 270. Laguna Mariscal (1992) ad *Silv.* 3.3.167b-171 notes parallels with Ovid and the tradition of the *basilikos logos* but also important is Statius' willingness to depict Domitian's foreign conquests

allusion to Virgilian epic; Domitian's *horrida bella* are not even worthy of a triumph (*non est dignata triumpho*).[559] By partaking in such a heroic, epic, culture-defining conflict, Domitian is almost demeaning himself. He is superior to such warfare. The description of Domitian as *ductor placidissime* in such a military context is almost paradoxical, evoking images of the mild and frightening expression of Domitian on his equestrian statue (*iuvat ora tueri | mixta notis, bellum placidamque gerentia pacem*, *Silv.* 1.1.15-16).[560] Yet this description also taps into the comparison between emperor and Jupiter; Domitian is an earthly Jupiter (cf. 3.3.156-64), far superior to Virgil's Aeneas and a calm and indulgent conqueror, overthrowing foreign peoples and dispensing justice amongst them.[561] Domitian does not grant his *clementia* to citizens but to barbarians (note the arbitrary and autocratic qualities of *parcentia* and *donat*). Statius also praises Domitian's *clementia* in the context of his legislation forbidding the castration of boys:

> nondum pulchra ducis clementia coeperat ortu
> *intactos servare mares; nunc frangere sexum*
> atque hominem mutare nefas
>
> (*Silv.* 3.4.73-5)[562]

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as epic deeds. The 'epicising' of Domitian's *clementia* is an important theme in the poem, see below p.209; cf. Gibson (2006). Cf. Ps.-Sen. *Oct.* 776, 806 with Ferri (2003) ad 806.

[559] Domitian celebrated at least two and perhaps four triumphs including a double triumph over the Chatti and Dacians in AD 89: see Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.66-7; Suet. *Dom.* 6.1, 13.3; Griffin (2000a) 63. Although Domitian's 'conquests' were scorned by later writers, triumphal processions clearly remained among the most important and most jealously guarded imperial privileges in the imperial period, cf. Mattern (1999) 167-8.

[560] See above, chapter 2 on *Silv.* 1.1. Cf. Hulls (forthcoming, 2007) on *Silv.*4.2.42-3 where Statius observes the facial paradox from the opposite direction, marvelling at Domitian's warlike appearance in a private, civilian context.

[561] Note the description of Domitian as an earthly Jupiter at *Silv.* 3.4.17-19, *misisti Latio placido quem fronte ministrum| Iuppiter Ausonius pariter Romanaque Iuno | aspiciunt*. The description of Jupiter as *placidus* is unusual, although cf. Prop. 2.16.47-8. The adjective *placidissime* clearly conveys similar, if not synonymous notions as the adjective *serenus*, which often describes Jupiter wielding power, and by analogy to Jupiter describes the power of an absolute ruler. *Serenus* and associated imagery is used by Lucan to describe Julius Caesar's *clementia*, by Seneca to describe Nero's power in the *de Clementia*, and by Martial and Statius to describe Domitian: see Leigh (1997) 56-67.

[562] Cf. Mart. 9.11-13, 16, 17, 36; Dio 67.2-3; Laguna Mariscal (1992) *ad loc.*

Again, *clementia* operates in a context that is not juridical. Instead, Statius indicates the absolute and quasi-divine nature of the emperor's power, here used to spare innocent boys from harm.[563] Thus the nature of Domitian's *clementia* exists in a very different context from that of earlier emperors. Statius illustrates the nature of the emperor's *clementia* not in terms of the emperor's relationships with his citizens (beyond his legislation on castration as it is related in Statius' poem on Earinus) nor according to how it might operate in a quasi-legal context, as was crucial for the representation of Titus' *clementia*, but rather in more autocratic and militaristic contexts.

The notion of *clementia* that operated under Domitian's elder brother Titus and was espoused in the *Octavia* is redeployed in slightly different contexts by Statius. Firstly, it still seems unlikely that the strict Stoic doctrine that Seneca insisted upon in the *de Clementia* was really adopted by Domitian any more than it was by his brother and father; Titus' exercise of *clementia* certainly acts in opposition to Seneca's work, and there is no evidence to suggest that his younger brother displayed the quality in the way that Seneca intended. Yet both Flavian emperors clearly display a form of *clementia* that has some accord with Seneca's theory, notably the sense of autocratic power that underpins the exercise of *clementia* and, in Domitian's case, the link with Jupiter that is visible in the imagery with which Seneca illustrates the nature of Nero's power as emperor. In examining Statius' portrayal of Domitian we are looking at an emperor (or a poet) responding not, it seems, to the philosophical detail of Seneca's work, but to his brother's more generalised concept of *clementia*. Secondly, Statius does not present Domitian being concerned, as was the case for Titus, to present *clementia* constantly and consistently via his juridical relationship with the Roman people. No surprise that Dio later ascribed to Domitian a belief that those emperors who did not punish many men were fortunate rather than outstanding (Dio 67.2). Rather Statius presents Domitian's *clementia* towards the Roman people as a reflection of his status as an earthly Jupiter and his power over foreign peoples in both diplomatic and military terms. An obvious benefit to this strategy is that it makes any display of *clementia*

[563] On Domitian's legislation against castration, see Coleman (1988) ad 4.3.13-15.

potentially much more palatable to Roman citizens. Such considerations provide a considerable impetus to the novel depiction of *clementia* that appears in Statius' *Thebaid*.[564]

Statius' representation on *clementia* in his mythological epic is consistent with the wider use of the term in Domitianic ideology. Although Oedipus mentions it when coming back to his senses following the deaths of his sons,[565] *clementia* seems to have little role to play until the final book, but there are a number of instances of *venia* in the poem which are worth examining briefly.[566] Instances of pardoning and sparing are unsurprisingly rare in the *Thebaid* and the language of such actions is more often negative. So Crotopus fails to spare his daughter (*neque enim ille coactis | donasset thalamis veniam pater*, 1.578-9), Partheopaeus' killing of enemies with arrows is described as failing to spare his opponents (*nulli tela aspera mortis | dant veniam*, 9.763-4) and Antigone begs Creon to pardon Oedipus, who himself scorns the very thought of forgiveness (*da veniam adflicto dictisque ignosce superbis*, 11.710; *indignans veniam*, 11.741). More positively, Polynices and Tydeus do forgive each other after Adrastus' intervention in their fight (*inque vicem ignoscunt*, 1.529). Yet the most salient example of *venia* in the poem suggests that, like Lucan before him, Statius regards *venia* in a negative light. In Book 3 of the *Thebaid*, Maeon tells Eteocles of how he came to be the only one of fifty men to be spared by Tydeus (3.59-77). Maeon makes it very clear that being spared in battle is indeed a fate worse than death:

> noctis vaga lumina testor
> *et socium manes et te, mala protinus ales,*
> qua redeo, non hanc lacrimis meruisse nec astu

[564] *Contra* Ripoll (1998) 420-46 and Delarue (2000) 161-8 who both read Statian *clementia* as a development of Senecan theory. This analysis is closer to Burgess (1972) esp. 348-9 who sees a redefinition of *clementia* offered as a model for Domitian, although I disagree with his suggestion, p.345, that Domitianic *clementia* never appears in response to *scelus*.

[565] Cf. 11.606, *estne sub hoc nominis clementia corde?* The term is also used to describe the Nile, 3.527.

[566] Cf. also Jupiter giving his divine council permission to sit down, *veniam donec pater ipse sedendi | tranquilla iubet esse manu* 1.204-5, combining the image of Jovian serenity with absolute authority; Hercules' deference to Pallas, 8.516.

crudelem veniam atque inhonorae munera lucis

(Theb. 3.63-6)

There is a similar episode in Book 9 where Hippomedon spares one of twin brothers who begs for death; both men clearly see being spared as greater punishment (9.293-5). In both instances it is made clear that *venia* is not a benefit but something that causes great suffering. Statius leaves a way open for *clementia* to provide an acceptable form of forgiveness in civil war.

It is the decision of the Argive widows (cf. Theb. 12.175) to supplicate Theseus in Athens at the *ara Clementiae* that really involves the poem in the notion of *clementia*. At the same time as Argia and Antigone are disposing of Polynices' body, the rest of the Argive women, now led by Capaneus' widow Evadne and aided by Juno, arrive in Athens. Juno, acting in the manner of a more benevolent Fama, introduces the story of the Argive widows in Athens in order to generate sympathy for their plight (12.464-80). There follows a long description of the Altar of *Clementia*, its function and history (12.481-518). This is then followed by a description of the triumphal return of Theseus to Athens after his conquest of *the Amazons (12.519-39) which is interrupted by Evadne as she makes a long speech of* supplication to Theseus (12.540-86). The description of the altar itself poses a number of problems:

urbe fuit media nulli concessa potentum
ara deum, mitis posuit Clementia sedem,
et miseri fecere sacram; sine supplice numquam
illa novo, nulla damnavit vota repulsa.
auditi quicumque rogant, noctesque diesque
ire datum et solis numen placare querelis.
parca superstitio: non turea flamma nec altus
accipitur sanguis: lacrimis altaria sudant,

maestarumque super libamina secta comarum

pendent et vestes mutata sorte relictae.

mite nemus circa cultuque insigne verendo,

vittatae laurus et supplicis arbor olivae.

nulla autem effigies, nulli commisa metallo

forma dei: mentes habitare et pectora gaudet.

semper habet trepidos, semper locus horret egenis

coetibus, ignotae tantum felicibus arae.

...

huc victi bellis patriaque a sede fugati

regnorumque inopes scelerumque errore nocentes

conveniunt pacemque rogant; mox hospita sedes

vicit et Oedipodae Furias et funus †olynthi†

texit et a misero matrem summovit Oreste.

(*Theb.* 12.481-96, 507-11)

Statius' conception of the *ara Clementiae* is radically different from the real altar in Athens and seemingly rather original in Roman literature and thought; the altars of Pity at Athens and Epidauros both represented Eleos as a male figure, whereas Statius has a female deity with no cult statue.[567] Furthermore, the altar is consistently referred to in Latin sources as the *ara Misericordiae* (and it seems reasonable to suggest that Statius might have found a convenient periphrasis for the metrically intractable *misericordia*)[568] and Statius creates an unusual aniconic cult without blood or fire sacrifices, which suggests both the absence of

[567] See Braund (1996) 11; cf. Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.* Aniconic worship was the norm in the cases of the *manalis lapis* (see Serv. ad *Aen.* 3.175; Latte (1960) 78n.4) and Jupiter Elicius (see *RE* 10.1128; Latte (1960) 78-9; Ogilvie (1965) ad Livy 1.20.7). Varro suggests that the earliest Romans had no cult statues (*ARD* 18 Cardauns = Aug. *de Civ. Dei* 4.31.21-9; cf. Plut. *Numa* 8.7-8; Serv. ad *Aen.* 1.505); the absence of cult statue for this distinctly Roman quality combined with *Theb.* 12.500-5 might suggest that Clementia has a particularly ancient cult. *Clementia* is normally only a male quality: see Dowling (2006) 14-15. On the divinity of *clementia* in Rome, see Dowling (2006) 214-15.

[568] See Braund (1996) 9.

imagery to illustrate *clementia* in Seneca's *de Clementia* and another Senecan fragment rejecting sacrifice.[569] As a place of worship but not of sacrifice, the *ara Clementiae* is clearly intended to break the Theban cycle of revenge.[570] Yet the altar and cult do not exactly conform to this Stoic, Senecan basis either. The goddess Clementia is clearly intended to evoke an image similar to that of the goddess Pietas. Oedipus associates the two in his important speech in the previous book (11.605-7) and, despite the absence of a cult statue, the goddess Clementia is clearly realised as a personification in the manner of Pietas, is likewise part of the pantheon of heavenly gods (12.500-5; cf. 11.457-96; she receives sacrifices, albeit atypical ones, 12.487-92), and blurs the distinction between innate psychological condition and genuine divine being (*mentes habitare et pectora gaudet*, 494).

Statius' ecphrasis of the altar reveals the nature of Clementia. She herself lacks power (*nulli concessa potentum | ara deum*, 481-2) and the power that *clementia* clearly has (note the transformation of the Argive women as soon as they arrive, *vix ibi, sedatis requierunt pectora curis*, 12.514) must therefore come through another agency. Indeed, Clementia appears weak in other respects; she never rejects a prayer and always listens to her suppliants day and night (*auditi quicumque rogant, noctesque diesque | ire datum et solis numen placare querelis*, 12.485-6). Clementia is something of a soft touch. In this respect she bears more than a passing resemblance to Titus, who also consistently displayed *clementia* no matter what the circumstances. Moreover, the lack of cult statue suggests an emphasis on the goddess as amorphous *numen*, while the terms in which the absence of cult statuary are made (*nulli commissa metallo | forma dei*, 493-4) again denotes a de-emphasis of power;[571] *metallo* suggests a large precious metal image that illustrates a god's size and brightness. Both the goddess and the grove that surrounds her altar are described as *mitis*

[569] Sen. fr. 123 Haase, cf. Braund (1996) 11-12; Pollmann (2004) ad 12.487-8 and 493.
[570] Hardie (1993) 46.
[571] Compare Silius' depiction of the temple of Hercules at Gades, esp. *Pun.* 3.30-1, *sed nulla effigies simulacrave nota deorum | maiestate locum et sacro implevere timore.* Cf. Gibson (2005) 182 and n.14.

(482, 491), an adjective that suggests restraint of power.[572] However, *mitis* also crucially suggests autocratic, and in a Roman context, imperial power; *mitis* is a typical epithet for an emperor, the one individual who can exercise *clementia*.[573] The link between *clementia* and *mitis* through the person of an absolute ruler is made by Seneca in his description of Augustus in the *de Clementia* (*divus Augustus fuit mitis princeps, si quis illum a principatu suo aestimare incipiat, Clem.* 1.9.1) and is also crucial to the presentation of the restrained but all-powerful Domitian in *Silvae* 1.1 (1.1.15, 25). Furthermore, Domitian is not the only all-powerful ruler described in these terms by Statius; Hypsipyle describes Jupiter deliberately slowing nightfall on the day when the Lemnian men return from war in Thrace, so that their murder by their wives will be delayed a little longer:

> tardius umenti noctem deiecit Olympo
> *Iuppiter et versum miti, reor, aethera cura*
> sustinuit, dum fata vetant
>
> (*Theb.* 5.177-9)

Hypsipyle suggests a surprising quality for Jupiter even as he breaks the laws of Fate and reveals the extent of his power. Hypsipyle's tale marks a strong distinction between Jupiter, who retains the power to do something, and the ineffectual Clementia. Moreover, Jupiter slows the turning of the earth with gentle care (*miti cura*). Mildness in surprising contexts becomes a theme; Domitian shows mildness in even his most warlike moments (*Silv.* 1.1.15, 25, 32-3; 3.3.167; cf. 4.2.42-3). Statius is invoking a complex of terminology used to describe the nature of absolute power. Links emerge between the language of mildness and *clementia*, absolute power, and key figures such as Domitian and Jupiter, but

[572] *TLL* 1154.21-76. It is regularly used of the restrained Adrastus, 1.448, 467; 7.537; 11.110; *inmitis* is used of Creon, 11.689; cf. Sen.*HF* 569-70. Polynices is praised for his gentleness by the old Theban man, *tamen ille precanti | mitis et adfatu bonus et patientor aequi*, 1.189-90; Eteocles urges his men to show no mercy following Tydeus' cannibalism, *quisquamne Pelasgis | mitis adhuc hominemque gerit?*, 9.12-13.
[573] Cf. Ov. *Tr.* 4.8.38; *Ex Pont.* 2.8.51; Sen. *HF* 741.

where Domitian and Jupiter are mild or display *clementia* in their most aggressive or powerful moments, the goddess Clementia is herself relatively lacking in power. Moreover, Domitian himself displays this paradoxical set of characteristics, revealing gentleness and power simultaneously, when he is depicted in statuary portraits. *Silvae* 1.1, a poem which goes out of its way to depict the emperor's mildness when in warlike pose, is an ecphrasis of Domitian's equestrian statue. Two further examples will elucidate this point. Martial compares Domitian as he is depicted in a statue to Jupiter *serenus*:[574]

quis Palatinos imitatus imagine vultus
Phidiacum Latio marmore vicit ebur?
haec mundi facies, haec sunt Iovis ora sereni:
sic tonat ille deus cum sine nube tonat.
nam solam tribuit Pallas tibi, Care, coronam;
effigiem domini, quam colis, illa dedit.

(Martial 9.24)

Domitian's statue here portrays the emperor as Jupiter with a mild facial expression. Yet his power is made entirely apparent; Jupiter can thunder from a cloudless sky, and by extension, the emperor is supremely and unpredictably powerful.[575] Similar comparisons are made in a series of poems later in book 9, where Martial tells of the newly dedicated temple of Hercules which contains a statue bearing Domitian's own features (9.64). The following poem claims that had Hercules really appeared as Domitian he would not have suffered any of his misfortunes during his mortal life whilst blurring distinctions between Domitian and

[574] The depiction of Domitian as Jupiter was commonplace. In Martial and Statius, see Sauter (1934) 54-78; Scott (1936) 133-40; Sullivan (1995) 137-45; Nauta (2002) *passim*; for other poets, cf. Fears (1981a). In art, Domitian was regularly depicted as Jupiter, e.g. *in sinu dei* in the temple of Jupiter Custos: see Tac. *Hist.* 3.74.1. For coinage with similar depictions, cf. Nauta (2002) 381n.10.
[575] See Leigh (1997) 60-2 and esp. the detailed footnotes, 60n.42, 61n.43.

Jupiter (9.65).[576] Later on, Martial claims Domitian is a greater Hercules; depiction as statue gives way to recognition as god (*Herculeum tantis numen non sufficit actis: | Tarpeio deus hic commodet ora patri*, 9.101.23-4). Domitian shows a similarly paradoxical face in person, when Statius sees him in his palace on the Palatine:

> ipsum, ipsum cupido tantum spectare vacavit
> *tranquillum vultu* sed *maiestate serena*
> mulcentem radios summitentemque modeste
> fortunae vexilla suae; tamen ore nitebat
> dissimulatus honos.
>
> vultu sed M, *Courtney* : vultus et *Politianus*, *Shackleton Bailey*
>
> (*Silvae* 4.2.40-4)

Here Domitian displays all the characteristics of a supremely powerful yet mild ruler, a wielder of *clementia*. Statius overloads the description of the emperor's face with epithets designed to show his mildness (*tranquillum, serena, mulcentem, modeste*) but the effect is a reversal of the pattern: here in a private context Domitian is a godlike, military leader. What is more, Domitian resembles the statue that the Athenian goddess Clementia lacks (a constant theme in 4.2);[577] he is majestic, awe-inspiring, shining and radiant (*radios, ore nitebat, dissimulatus honos*), typical attributes of a large metal cult statue in a temple. Therefore the pointed absence of an awe-inspiring statue is a literal representation of the absence of a powerful god (*potentum...deum, Theb.* 12.481-2). Clementia's weakness, her lack of real power, lack of selectivity in her dealings with her worshippers and availability

[576] Esp. 9.65.1-2 *Alcide, Latio nunc agnoscende Tonanti, | postquam pulchra dei Caesaris ora geris*. Both Jupiter and Domitian could claim to be a 'Latin Thunderer' who recognises Hercules. Jupiter deified Hercules, while Domitian somewhat paradoxically recognised Hercules in a religious sense by building his temple on the *via Latia*.

[577] See Newlands (2002) 271-5; and Hulls (forthcoming, 2007).

day and night is highlighted by the lack of cult statuary. The altar of Clementia leaves a gap to be filled by another powerful person, that of the ruler.[578]

In other respects, Statius' portrayal of the goddess Clementia contains familiar ideas from the Flavian and Domitianic ideology of *clementia*. The altar is still essentially the centre of unequal relationships. Clementia welcomes suppliants (*sine supplice numquam | illa novo*, 12.483-4), gatherings of those in need (*egenis coetibus*, 12.495-6), those conquered in warfare (*victi bellis*, 12.507; cf. *Silv.* 3.3.168-70) and those guilty of crime (*scelerumque errore nocentes*, 12.508).[579] Clementia essentially covers all the contexts in which we have seen Titus and Domitian exercise their *clementia*. It remains a quality exercised by an absolute authority over a criminal or over a conquered people. Textual links also suggest a broader relationship between the portrayal of Clementia in the *Thebaid* and Domitian's *clementia* as it is represented in the *Silvae*.

Specifically, there are a number of textual similarities between the depiction of the *ara Clementiae* in Book 12 of the *Thebaid* and the mention of Domitian's *clementia* in *Silvae* 3.3. The latter poem is a consolation written for the wealthy equestrian patron of both Statius and Martial, Claudius Etruscus, on the death of his father, an imperial freedman manumitted under Tiberius who served under Caligula, Claudius and Nero and was appointed *a rationibus* by Vespasian, who admitted him to the equestrian order, but he was banished by Domitian in about AD 83 to Campania before being allowed to return in 90 or 91 and dying probably at the end of AD 92.[580] Statius' consolatory poem on Etruscus' father remembers the circumstances of his return from exile in Campania. Statius explores the reasons for the father's exile (he posits old age and exhaustion due to his heavy workload)

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[578] The absence of the statue itself need not indicate an absence of power; cf. the shrine at Mount Carmel, Tac. *Hist.* 2.78.

[579] For links between this passage and Euripides *Supplices*, see Braund (1996) 9. The nature of the guilty parties that Clementia welcomes is unclear. *Error* might suggest derangement or mistake, *OLD s.v. error* 4, 5, but it might also imply wandering from a correct moral path, *OLD s.v. error* 6. As examples, Oedipus and Orestes (12.510-11) might conceivably represent all three meanings of *error*.

[580] For a more extensive reconstruction of the father's life see Mart. 6.83; 7.40; Stat. *Silv.* 3.3; Weaver (1965); (1972) 284-94; Evans (1978); Nauta (2002) 230-1. On Claudius Etruscus himself, see also Mart. 6.42; Stat. *Silv.* 1.5; White (1975) 275-9.

and the shock of the punishment.[581] He also attributes his return from exile to the efforts of Claudius and praises Domitian for his mercy (3.3.154-67).[582] This passage leads into the description of Domitian's bellicose *clementia* that we examined above. Statius presents his audience with an unexpected tour de force, using the death of Etruscus' father as a frame for an ideologically charged representation of Domitian that blurs all distinction between emperor and Jupiter.

Moreover, Martial 6.83, a poem on Etruscus' father's return from exile, also makes the same ideological moves. Domitian is referred to as *summe ducum* (3.3.155; cf. *summe ducum*, Mart. 6.83.2) and Statius depicts Etruscus' father waiting for punishment from Domitian in the form of a falling lightning bolt (*venturi fulminis ictus*, 3.3.158) but Domitian is content to warn him with thunder and a gentle storm (*tonitru tantum lenique procella | contentus monuisse*, 3.3.159-60), while Martial praises Domitian for recalling his thunderbolt and showing greater restraint than Jupiter in this regard (6.83.3-6). Moreover, Statius compares the mild sentence of exile in southern Italy passed on Etruscus' father to that of an unnamed *socius curarum* banished overseas (3.3.160-5).[583] Etruscus' father is not

[581] For the theory that Etruscus' father was exiled for opposition to Domitian's coinage reforms in AD 82, see Carradice (1979).

[582] Hints of the martial context of Domitian's *clementia* are apparent in the words *Romuleum reseras iterum, Germanice, limen*, 3.3.165. The name *Germanicus* was earned in Domitian's campaign against the Chatti and first used by him in the summer of 83 AD: see Jones (1992) 129. Furthermore, the opening of the Romulean gates seems an unusual way of expressing a return from exile and mimics the opening of the gates of the temple of Janus in times of war. Statius may even be making a subtle allusion to Janus in Ovid *Fasti* 1, another poem addressed to *Caesar Germanicus*, cf. *Fast.* 1.3. Domitian transferred the cult of Janus to a new shrine in the Forum Transitorium, see Jones (1992) 85.

[583] The identity of the *socius curarum* at 3.3.161 is unclear; Laguna Mariscal (1992) ad 3.3.160-4 suggests a colleague of Etruscus' father. Jones (1992) 189 and Shackleton Bailey (2003) 212 assume a subordinate of Etuscus' father. The phrase seemingly indicates a minister of some kind and has obvious parallels with Tacitus' description of Sejanus as *socius laborum*: see Martin & Woodman (1989) ad *Ann.* 4.2.3. Thus one might expect a person of some seniority and not an *adiutor* to a freedman. Another reading would be to posit that the *curae* belong to Domitian and not Etruscus' father with *hic*, 3.3.162, producing a slightly stronger contrast. Thus we are looking for a minister to Domitian. Evidence of banishments, particularly their dating, is very thin, although Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.17) claims that many men were banished early in Domitian's reign for no reason whatsoever (cf. Jones (1992) 188-92). One suggestion might be that the *socius curarum* is another senior freedman, possibly Ti. Claudius Classicus, one of Titus' most senior freedmen, who had the unique distinction of being both *a cubiculo* and *procurator castrensis* simultaneously (see Weaver (1980); Boulvert (1981); Bruun (1990); Jones (1992) 61-9). An inscription (*AE* (1972) 574) indicates his appointment under Titus and Nerva and possible advancement to equestrian rank but makes no mention of Domitian. Might Classicus, as Titus' favourite, have incurred Domitian's suspicion or wrath and been exiled? The evidence is insufficient, and the *damnatio memoriae* of Domitian

really an exile but a guest (*hospes, non exul, erat*, 164), an image that reverses a pattern established by Ovid when begging for a closer and thus milder place of exile and invoking Augustus' *clementia* as he does so (*mitius exilium... quantaque in Augusto clementia*, Ov. *Trist.* 4.4.51, 53). Statius praises Domitian for his *clementia* in allowing the return of Etruscus' father and the redemption of his house (*maerentemque foves inclinatosque penates | erigis*, 166-7) but this is only granted after the supplication of Etruscus himself. Both Statius and Martial suggest that it is the intervention of Etruscus that changes the emperor's mind, although Etruscus may have been in exile with his father (cf. the hint at Mart. 6.83.8, *comiti* suggesting the formula *comes exilii*). The relationship between divine power and criminality, supplication and redemption that is central to the cult of Clementia in Athens is identical to the operation of *clementia* in imperial Rome.

In many ways, *Silvae* 3.3 repeats the processes of *Thebaid* 12; the section of the later poem that deals with exile transfers the interaction of the Argive women and Theseus to imperial Rome. A three-party system is in operation in both instances.[584] The Argive women beg the Athenian monarch on behalf of their husbands while Etruscus begs Domitian on behalf of his exiled father. Evadne's speech to Theseus is implicitly linked to the women's arrival at the *ara Clementiae* while Etruscus' alleged interaction with Domitian is presented as the offering of prayers and vows at an altar (cf. the hanging offerings to Clementia, *Theb.* 12.489-90, esp. *pendent*, 490):

> quas tibi devoti iuvenes pro patre renato,
> *summe ducum, grates aut quae pia vota rependant?*
>
> (*Silv.* 3.3.154-5)

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presumably precluded any mention of him on the inscription, yet we know that under Domitian the post of *a cubiculo* was filled by Parthenius, while Ti. Claudius Bucolas was *proc. castrensis*, indicating that Classicus lost his position at the very least. Moreover, the similarity in status makes him an obvious comparand for Etruscus' father and we should consider the possibility that Statius refers obliquely to him.

[584] Cf. Burgess (1972) on three-way exchange in this process.

Mourning is a central aspect of both poems; *Silvae* 3.3 centres on the grief of Claudius Etruscus for his father, incorporating the Ovidian theme of identifying exile with death,[585] while the uncontrolled grief of the Argive and Theban women will bring the *Thebaid* to a conclusion (12.782-96).[586] Beyond the general context, the Argive women's arrival in Athens is marked by a scene of frenzied grief (12.464-80, *coetumque gementem*, 466) and Juno, herself overcome by grief (*non ipsa minus*, 466), infects the Athenian populace (presumably also women, given that Theseus returns in triumph later) with Argive mourning even before they know the reason for it:

> omnis Erechtheis effusa penatibus aetas
> *tecta viasque replent: unde hoc examen et una*
> tot miserae? necdum causas novere malorum,
> iamque gemunt.
>
> (*Theb.* 12.471-4)

The mingling of Argives and Athenians in grief anticipates the final scene of Theseus' entry into Thebes (12.782-96) where invasion (*nec tecta hostilia victor | aspernatus init*, 785-6) blends into a mixing of peoples (*pio...tumultu | permiscent*, 782-3) and grief and victory merge into one (*gaudent lamenta novaeque | exultant lacrimae*, 793-4). Juno performs a similar mixing of peoples as the Argive women 'invade' Athens, ensuring that the Athenian people will leave Theseus no option but to attack Creon:

> dea conciliis se miscet utrisque
> *cuncta docens, qua gente satae, quae funera plangant*
> quidve petant; variis nec non adfatibus ipsae

[585] Cf. Laguna Mariscal (1992) ad *Silv.* 3.3.154-71.
[586] Mourning is a hot topic in Statian studies: see esp. Dietrich (1999); Pagán (2000); Markus (2004).

Ogygias leges inmansuetumque Creonta

multum et ubique fremunt.

(*Theb.* 12.474-8)

Female mourning begins to drive the politics of book 12, but it is also quasi-female mourning that drives the political actions in *Silvae* 3.3. Claudius Etruscus is depicted as displaying an exceptional level of grief for a father who died after an extraordinarily successful life at the age of ninety.[587] Statius makes pointed efforts to reduce the masculine status of Claudius as mourner, twice calling him 'young man' (*iuvenis*, 3.3.30, 154; he even refers to Claudius as *puer* at 1.5.64 despite the fact that he must have been in his forties) and depicting his grief as extraordinary, even excessive (esp. 3.3.8-12, 151-3, 173-216). Claudius behaves in a manner that is almost indistinguishable from that of the Argive women in *Thebaid* 12. Statius further interlinks the two by using the same mythical *exemplum* to illustrate the level of grief, comparing Argive women and the song he writes for Claudius to the myth of Tereus:

Geticae non plura queruntur

hospitibus tectis trunco sermone volucres,

cum duplices thalamos et iniquum Terea clamant.

(*Theb.* 12.478-80)

hic maesti pietas me poscit Etrusci

qualia nec Siculae modulantur carmina rupes

[587] Claudius' grief does not seem to fall neatly into a therapeutic model (see Erskine (1997) on such a model in Cicero) where *aegritudo* is a sickness to be cured. Rather Claudius' exceptional expression of grief is to be celebrated as much as his father's life.

nec fati iam certus olor saevique marita

Tereos.

(*Silv.* 3.3.173-6)[588]

Moreover, we should also note that both scenes of mourning and *clementia* are closely associated with triumphal processions; Statius links Claudius' father's introduction into the equestrian order by Titus with Titus' decision to allow Claudius himself to take part in the Jewish triumphal procession in AD 81 (3.3.138-45) while Theseus' entry into Athens following the description of the *ara Clementiae* is depicted as a triumph (*Theb.* 12.519-39). Finally, Claudius is directly compared to Theseus, linking his grief for his father to that of Theseus for Aegeus (*haud aliter gemuit per Sunia Theseus | litora quem falsis deceperat Aegea velis*, *Silv.* 3.3.179-80),[589] a reference which picks up on the epithet *Aegides* which Evadne uses at the opening of her speech to Theseus (*Theb.* 12.546) and nearly repeats another reference to Aegeus' death (*Sunion, unde vagi casurum in nomina ponti | Cresia decepit falso ratis Aegea velo,* 12.625-6).

Statius goes to great efforts to involve Domitian's display of *clementia* in his consolatory poem to Claudius Etruscus, and further links that display of *clementia* with the altar of Clementia in his *Thebaid*. The implication is that the processes of granting *clementia* are to be identified with one another; Athenian mercy and Domitianic mercy are one and the same. Such tightness in comparison allows us to push our understanding of *clementia* in the *Thebaid* further forward. The Argive women achieve a sense of respite when they reach Clementia's altar but they do not feel relief (cf. the crane simile, 12.515-18).[590] Instead they

[588] Although Tereus is the common link, different birds may be referred to in these two examples, the Argive women being compared to swallows (see Pollmann (2004) *ad loc.*) and Claudius being compared to a nightingale. Like Ovid (*Met.* 6.412-74), Statius does not make clear which of Procne and Philomela is transformed into which bird (see Bömer (1969-86) ad *Met.* 6.669; Dietrich (1999) 48). The three examples of grief in *Silv.* 3.3 are repeated in Statius' lament for his father at *Silv.* 5.3.80-5 and Sirens and Philomela as *exempla* of grief are also paired by Seneca, *HO* 189-93; cf. *Silv.* 2.4.21.

[589] In reading *per Sunia* for *periuria* and *litora quem* for *litora, qui*, I follow the emendations of these lines suggested by Shackleton Bailey (2003) 393.

[590] The Argive women are compared to migrating cranes finding relief when they reach Alexandria and the Nile, a river which Statius earlier accorded the quality of *clementia*, 3.527.

are required to wait for the arrival of Theseus in Athens (12.519-39) and his very Roman (and very anachronistic) triumphal procession provides yet another basis for comparison with Domitian. The triumph also provides another interesting slant on *clementia* through the attitude of the conquered Amazons:

> ipsae autem nondum trepidae sexumve fatentur,
> nec vulgare gemunt, aspernaturque precari,
> et tantum innuptae quaerunt delubra Minervae.
>
> (*Theb.* 12.529-31)

The Amazons are clearly the exact opposite of the Argive women; refusing to admit their femininity, lament or pray, they seek the shrine of a martial goddess. Hippolyte already shows the process of feminization (*quod nitidi crines, quod pectora palla | tota latent*, 12.537-8; cf. also *nondum*, 12.529)[591] but for the moment these women are treated as male captives in a triumphal procession. The masculinity of the Amazons and their affiliation to a virgin goddess (*innuptae*) also highlights, if subtly, the division between the unburied Argive men and their wives; the Amazons require no intermediary in treating with their conqueror. These differences highlight the necessity of a sense of criminality in the dispensation of *clementia*; those who receive it have committed some wrong. The Amazons have fought and lost and their nature will ultimately be civilised by Theseus and the Athenians (*magnis quod barbara semet Athenis | misceat*, 12.538-9). Yet they have retained their honour and would not be subject to *clementia*; their mixing with the Athenian people will be more productive than either mixings of mourners at the Altar of Clementia or at the end of the poem in Thebes (*atque hosti veniat paritura marito*, 12.539; cf. 12.474, 783).

[591] *Nondum* need not be 'chilling', as Ahl (1986) 2894 suggests. Rather it suggests a process of transformation from barbarian masculine warrior into civilised mourning female.

Theseus will end the male line in Thebes by killing Creon while Hippolyte is restrained from taking part in the fighting because she is pregnant (12.635-8).[592]

The comparison between conquered Amazons and Argive women indicates that the dead men for whom Evadne pleads have committed crimes which require appropriate punishment. Evadne's speech to Theseus (12.546-86) is full of rhetorical trickery designed to persuade the Athenian king to come to their aid, but it also reveals the nature of the aid that Evadne seeks. Evadne admits that her people are unable to help themselves (*de nostris...ruinis*, 547) but she subtly shifts attention towards the guiltlessness of the Argive women (*dirae nec conscia noxae | turba sumus*, 548-9) whilst passing over the undoubted guilt of the Argive army in silence, instead lamenting the needlessness of the war that Argos has just lost (*quid enim septena movere | castra et Agenoreos opus emendare penates?*, 550-1). Despite Evadne's subtle presentation of the Argive war against Thebes, we can see that there is a sense that the unburied men have committed a crime, for which they have been punished (*nec querimur caesos: haec bella iura vicesque | armorum*, 552-3; *sed cecidere odia et tristes mors obruit iras*, 574), but Creon's edict forbidding burial is punishment too harsh (553-61). Evadne's rhetorical questions are deliberately phrased so as to open an obvious role for Theseus himself (*ubi numina, ubi illest | fulminis iniusti iaculator? ubi estis, Athenae?*, 561-2). The Athenian king is invited to step into the role of Jupiter as a dispenser of *clementia* and become the *numen* unrepresented in the altar of Clementia; like Domitian, Theseus can play Jupiter on earth, and, as *iniusti* suggests, he can do a better job than

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[592] Statius employs a metapoetic ploy in these lines (12.635-8):

isset et Arctoas Cadmea ad moenia ducens
Hippolyte turmas: retinet iam certa tumentis
spes uteri, coniunxque rogat dimittere curas
Martis et emeritas thalamo sacrare pharetras.

Theseus' entreaties to Hippolyte evoke the language and metaphors of amatory elegy (turning aside from martial cares, dedicating quivers (themselves suggestive of Cupid?) in marriage beds) by shifting epic, martial language into an amatory context. This is a trick typical of Statius, reversing poetic trends by turning poetic language back into a concrete reality. Statius infuses greater irony into this passage by depicting Hippolyte held back from fighting by the certainty of her swollen womb and employing *tumentis*, a word often used to describe swollen epic language: see *OLD* s.v. *tumeo* 5. As with *nondum*, 12.529, the shift from epic to elegiac mode suggests a transformation into a more peaceful and civilised nature.

Statius' morally dubious king of the gods. Evadne gives examples of Theseus' prior deeds in battle where he has brought justice to foreign lands and ensured burial:

> tu quoque, ut egregios fama cognovimus actus,
> non trucibus monstris Sinin infandumque dedisti
> Cercyona, et saevum velles Scirona crematum.
> credo et Amazoniis Tanain fumasse sepulcris,
> unde haec arma refers; sed et hunc dignare triumphum.
> da terris unum caeloque Ereboque laborem
>
> (*Theb.* 12.575-80)

Yet the examples of Theseus' *egregii actus* do not seem to have much bearing on the dispensation of *clementia*. Rather, Evadne has shifted her focus once again onto the topic of civilisation and burial. Theseus' killing of monsters, the brigand Sciron of Megara and Amazons represents his civilising influence; the smoking burial mounds at Tanais and Theseus' desire to have cremated rather than thrown Sciron into the sea, represent his past efforts to ensure proper burial for his enemies. Yet the example of Sciron seems poorly chosen and reveals Evadne's desire for Creon's death; Sciron was thrown off a cliff into the sea, a terrible death, as Statius has made clear.[593] Such a punishment seems extreme by any standard and looks suspiciously like an example of the young Theseus making a mistake similar to that made by Creon. A speech by an exile regarding such extreme punishments also anticipates the opening paragraphs of Tacitus' *Histories* (*plenum exiliis mare, infecti caedibus scopuli*, *Hist.* 1.2.2). Damon's commentary notes the large number of Flavian exiles who were ultimately executed, the poetic overtones of Tacitus' language (cf. *infectos caedibus enses*, *Theb.* 5.353, describing the swords of Lemnian men stained with own blood and wielded by their wives, a hugely powerful image of self-destructive civil strife for Tacitus to evoke) and the glee with which Pliny reports that Domitian's *delatores* suffered

[593] Cf. *Theb.* 9.300. Cf. Enn. *Thy.* W trg 369-70; J 296-7.

similar executions, 'cliffs included', under Trajan.[594] The examples of Theseus' justice that Evadne uses do not call *clementia* to mind but rather the cycles of civil strife and revenge that Theseus is ostensibly supposed to break.

Evadne does not ask for the gift of *clementia* but for Theseus to labour in revenge (*da... laborem*). Evadne cunningly moves away from the dictates of *clementia* and attempts to set her own agenda for Theseus. Statius leaves open the question of whether Theseus' deeds fulfil the requirements of *clementia*. He certainly gives mercy to the Argive dead by defeating Creon and ensuring the disposal of the bodies, but his defeat of Creon in an extraordinarily one-sided single combat (a rather tame re-run of Aeneas and Turnus in *Aeneid* 12 that seems deliberately anti-climactic) has a flat finality that lacks any air of mercy. Moreover, it is unclear whether his ensuring of the burial of the Argive dead really constitutes *clementia* either; rather his insistence upon funeral rites is protective of his own people, preventing a pollution spreading from Thebes (as Evadne makes clear, *vos ista decet vindicta, priusquam | Emathii Thracesque dolent, quaeque exstat ubique | gens arsura rogis manesque habitura supremos*, 12.570-2 and Theseus affirms, *terrarum leges et mundi foedera mecum | defensura cohors, dignas insumite mentes | coeptibus*, 12.642-4). Theseus does not take up Evadne's implicit suggestion and his final words in the poem make clear that Creon's burial at least will be assured (12.771-3, 779-81). Yet no mention is made of *clementia* and it seems that Creon's punishment, however just and deserved, is nonetheless as severe a punishment as Theseus could legitimately inflict; Theseus acts much in the manner of Tiberius, shifting towards *severitas* rather than *clementia* in his pursuit of *iustitia*. Theseus, like Domitian, appears in the guise of Jupiter as he dispenses justice over Creon and Thebes; as the Athenian army prepares to leave for Thebes, yet Theseus is compared to Jupiter causing raging winter storms in a simile (12.650-5) and his speech to Creon as he prepares to kill him is delivered in the manner of a raging Jupiter (*nec non prius ore superbo | intonat*, 12.770-1). There is a powerful difference between Theseus as he is depicted fighting the Thebans and Domitian as he is depicted in his dispensation of *clementia*; both

[594] Damon (2003) *ad loc.*

are earthly versions of Jupiter who are characterised by means of weather related metaphors but while Domitian is mild and placid, Theseus is raging and angry.

Thus Theseus is central to any dispensation of *clementia* at the end of the *Thebaid*. He fulfils the role left open by both the goddess Clementia and by Jupiter, and which he is invited to fill by Evadne's supplication. His autocratic power is required for *clementia* to be exercised. This has implications for the goddess Clementia. Her absence at the altar is disconcerting, revealing an absence at the heart of *clementia* as a concept and reflecting an absence of power in the goddess herself. Clementia in *Thebaid* 12 functions almost as an 'absent presence' or possibly even a 'present absence' indicating the fluctuating nature and interpretive centre of *clementia* as a concept. Clementia overshadows the arrival of the Argive women in Athens, their ability to persuade Theseus to come to their husbands' aid and Theseus' dispensing of justice over Thebes. Yet in reality her function is peripheral; Clementia is an insubstantial presence, sympathetic but powerless; the *ara Clementiae* is a temporary place of relief for the Argive women and it is Evadne's long, rhetorically effective and occasionally dissimulating speech that persuades Theseus; the Athenian king's dealings with Creon may reflect an essentially just outcome, but have little to do with *clementia*. The goddess Clementia, however, has an air of emptiness about her and the *clementia* she represents seems to be remarkably evanescent, subjective and relative. Evadne can claim (almost by virtue of her location in the shrine as she speaks to Theseus who passes by during his triumph) that it would be an act of *clementia* for Theseus to ensure her husband's burial. Theseus can similarly claim a display of *clementia* in his ensuring Creon's burial even as he slaughters him. Neither protagonist claims *clementia* as the motivation for their actions. Moreover, neither instance fits comfortably with the contemporary Flavian understanding of *clementia*, either the judicial sparing of criminals or the showing of mercy to conquered foreigners. Deciding whether Theseus is just in his actions is a separate question, but the Athenian king ultimately fails to step into the power gap that needs to be filled if *clementia* is to be exercised.

The *ara Clementiae* in *Thebaid* 12 is in direct contrast to the *clementia* that Domitian displays in *Silvae* 3.3 towards the father of Claudius Etruscus. Domitian undeniably takes the implicit invitation to fulfil the role of a mild, earthly Jupiter. Statius constructs an altar in his epic that remains empty, without a cult statue. The thematic and textual links that he constructs with that empty altar in the *Silvae* suggest that Domitian (so often represented in such a manner in reality) is the man to fill that gap and display true *clementia*. The lack of *clementia* in Theseus' conquest of Thebes suggests another sense of resistance to closure at the end of the poem; Theseus ultimately finds it difficult to impose his own form of closure on the epic as fighting shifts into mourning once more. Yet the suggestion is also implicit that we should look beyond Theseus' limitations towards Domitian as an imposer of closure in his own epic deeds (*Silv.* 3.3.167-71). Domitian's pseudo-epic wars *do* have a strong sense of closure in Statius' poetry (whatever the historical reality) and it is the emperor's *clementia* that allows peaceful closure to exist in these conflicts.

CHAPTER 5

EXPLORING TYRANNY

1. The rhetorical tyrant.

In March 49 BC, Cicero wrote a letter to Atticus (*ad Att.* 9.4) in which he claimed that the political situation was so bad that he felt he had run out of material for writing. Caesar had crossed the Rubicon, caused panic in Rome and the flight of much of the senatorial opposition. Cicero was considering how he might oppose him, if at all:[595]

ego etsi tam diu requiesco quam diu aut ad te scribo aut tuas litteras lego, tamen et ipse egeo argumento epistularum et tibi idem accidere certo scio. quae enim soluto animo familiariter scribi solent ea temporibus his excludentur, quae autem sunt horum temporum ea iam contrivimus. sed tamen, ne me totum aegritudini dedam, sumpsi mihi quasdam tamquam θέσεις, quae et πολιτικαὶ sunt et temporum horum, ut et abducam animum a querelis et in eo ipso de quo agitur exercear. eae sunt huius modi:

Εἰ μενετέον ἐν τῇ πατρίδι τυραννουμένης αὐτῆς. εἰ παντὶ τρόπῳ τυραννίδος κατάλυσιν πραγματευτέον, κἂν μέλλῃ διὰ τοῦτο περὶ τῶν ὅλων ἡ πόλις κινδυνεύσειν. εἰ εὐλαβητέον τὸν καταλύοντα μὴ αὐτὸς αἵρηται. εἰ πειρατέον ἀρήγειν τῇ πατρίδι τυραννουμένῃ καιρῷ καὶ λόγῳ μᾶλλον ἢ πολέμῳ. εἰ πολιτικὸν τὸ ἡσυχάζειν ἀναχωρήσαντά ποι τῆς πατρίδος τυραννουμένης ἢ διὰ παντὸς ἰτέον κινδύνου τῆς ἐλευθερίας πέρι. εἰ πόλεμον ἐπακτέον τῇ χώρᾳ καὶ πολιορκητέον αὐτὴν τυραννουμένην. εἰ καὶ μὴ δοκιμάζοντα τὴν διὰ πολέμου κατάλυσιν τῆς τυραννίδος συναπογραπτέον ὅμως τοῖς ἀρίστοις. εἰ τοῖς εὐεργέταις καὶ φίλοις συγκινδυνευτέον ἐν τοῖς πολιτικοῖς κἂν μὴ δοκῶσιν εὖ βεβουλεῦσθαι περὶ τῶν ὅλων. εἰ ὁ μεγάλα τὴν πατρίδα εὐεργετήσας δι' αὐτό τε τοῦτο ἀνήκεστα παθὼν καὶ φθονηθεὶς κινδυνεύσειεν ἂν ἐθελοντὴς ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος ἢ ἐφετέον αὐτῷ ἑαυτοῦ ποτε καὶ τῶν οἰκειοτάτων ποιεῖσθαι πρόνοιαν ἀφεμένῳ τὰς πρὸς τοὺς ἰσχύοντας διαπολιτείας.

[595] For a discussion of the letter as a way of 'living' a declamation, see Gunderson (2003) 104-10.

in his ego me consultationibus exercens et disserens in utramque partem tum Graece tum Latine et abduco parumper animum a molestiis et τῶν προὔργου τι delibero. sed vereor ne tibi ἄκαιρος sim. si enim recte ambulavit is qui hanc epistulam tulit, in ipsum tuum diem incidit.

(Cic. *Ad Att.* 9.4)

Yet the terms in which Cicero's letter considers a question that was both contemporary (*temporum horum*) and political (πολιτικαὶ) are surprising. The central element of his letter is written in Greek (*tum Graece tum Latine*); Cicero has engaged in hypothetical propositions (θέσεις) which he intends to consider without reference to the present situation. He engages with his pressing problem in a form of declamatory exercise;[596] the questions which Cicero asks himself are written in Greek and couched in abstract terms that seem very 'un-Roman'. He asks the question so familiar in later declamatory literature: '*what to do about a tyrant*?'. Cicero's reaction to tyranny is surprising precisely because of how he responds to his situation in this letter. He abstracts himself, considering the character of a Greek rhetorical model of tyranny and his possible responses to that tyranny in a way that (for the most part) ignores the local context. Yet as Gunderson notes: 'the un-Roman tyrant found in so many later declamations here cannot but allude to a very specific Roman ruler. But the flow of generalities verges ever closer to the ineluctably specific. Cicero's final proposition is long, complicated, and undisguisedly autobiographical.'[597] Cicero's letter illustrates a key development in Roman thought and literature. Caesar's assumption of autocratic power was a watershed in Roman history; after him the abstract image of the tyrant must have seemed more real. The typical Greek tyrant became a stock-in-trade of Roman rhetorical invective in the late Republic; accusations of *regnum*, *dominatio* or *tyrannis* were informed by the Greek stereotype in Roman political invective, and the terminology of *vis*, *superbia*, *libido*, and *crudelitas*, the most characteristic

[596] The letter combines elements of *suasoriae* and *controversiae*: see Gunderson (2003) 108.
[597] Gunderson (2003) 107.

vices of tyranny, was adopted and almost formed a shorthand for wider accusations of tyrannical behaviour.[598] The tyrant held a dominant position in rhetorical teaching throughout the first century AD; there are seven of the elder Seneca's *controversiae* in which the tyrant plays a dominant role.[599]

The conventional tyrant became the stock villain in a wide variety of spoken and written literature, moving from the earliest Roman tragedy to rhetoric and the *controversiae* of the rhetorical schools and thence into historiography, satire, epic and back into tragedy.[600] In the first century AD, the stereotype developed; *crudelitas* was gradually replaced by *saevitia* as the buzzword for describing tyrants.[601] Moreover, both *crudelitas* and *saevitia* were seen as antonyms of *clementia*, the quality with which the benevolent autocrat is identified.[602] The use of this vocabulary became formulaic and the tyrant of the *controversiae* became an increasingly important literary resource in the first century AD as emperors came to resemble cruel tyrants. Increasing emphasis was placed on the tyrant's greed (*avaritia*) as an expression of his desire to dominate his people. The tyrant's desire for that domination (*libido*) reflects his insatiable sexual appetites. Suetonius makes this pattern a defining system or rubric that governs his biographical accounts of tyrannical emperors, organising their lives through the categories of *saevitia*, *avaritia*, and so on.[603] While the stereotypical tyrant may possess all of these character traits, the use of these typical features is used in two interrelated ways by ancient authors. Firstly, authors can attribute tyrannical behaviour to those who are not autocratic rulers and will never properly become tyrants. Cicero turns Verres' governorship of Sicily into a localised tyranny, while Tacitus presents

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[598] See Dunkle (1967). Antony above all became the subject of such accusations, cf. Dunkle (1967) 164; (1971) 13-14; Corbeill (1997) 110-12.
[599] 1.7, 2.5, 3.6, 4.7, 5.8, 7.6, 9.4. See Winterbottom (1974) index 3, 'tyrants'; cf. Gunderson (2003) index, 'tyranny'.
[600] On Seneca's Lycus as a tragic tyrant informed by rhetorical tradition, see Dunkle (1967) 154-5 and n.10; on Roman historiography, see Walker (1952) 204-34; Syme (1958) 429; Dunkle (1971); important epic models for the Flavians include Ovid's Jupiter and Tereus, and, of course, Lucan's Caesar.
[601] See Dunkle (1971) 14. As in other literature, the *Thebaid* links tyrannical *saevitia* and wild animal imagery. *OLD* s.v. *saevitia* 1b; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.1. On wild beast imagery in the *Thebaid*, see Franchet-D'Espèrey (1999) 171-205. For the tyrant as a wild animal, cf. Cic. *Off.* 3.32; *Rep.* 2.48; 3.45; Sen. *Clem.* 1.25.1; 1.26.4; Pliny on Domitian as *inmanissima belua*, *Pan.* 48.3.
[602] Cf. Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.115; *Deiot.* 43; *Part. Or.* 11. Cf. Konstan (2005).
[603] E.g. Suet. *Dom.* 10-12 = *saevitia*, 12.1-12.2 = *avaritia*, 12.3-13 = *superbia*.

Sejanus (esp. *Ann.* 4.1) with all the tyrannical traits, despite the fact that technically he is not a tyrant. Secondly, ancient authors present these character traits selectively; tyrants do not always display all the possible features of a tyrannical character. Often one feature dominates. So Tacitus' Tiberius is characterised above all by his dissimulation while Vitellius is characterised by greed.

Despite the gaps in chronology, genre and political context, Cicero's letter shows a strong affinity with Statius' *Thebaid.* Both consider the problem of tyranny through a Greek lens, both invoke the rhetorical paradigm of the tyrant in their literature,[604] both present their discussion of responses to tyranny in allusive terms (Cicero through a declamatory exercise, Statius through mythology), both situate their presentation of tyranny in a context that in many ways can only respond to their contemporary political situations. Statius' epic poem takes an undeniably Roman problem, one that can only have become even more important under Domitian, and situates it in a mythical Greek context. Statius' *Thebaid* is a poem dominated by tyranny. With the exceptions of Adrastus and possibly Theseus, every autocrat in the poem can be accused of tyranny. Eteocles and Creon are the two tyrants who receive the most detailed exposition in the poem, Polynices is generally viewed as a tyrant-in-waiting, Jupiter is, like his Ovidian predecessor, a divine tyrant and there are a number of minor characters in the poem who are undoubtedly tyrannical, including Crotopus and Lycurgus.[605] Yet Statius does not create an uncomplicated acceptance of the rhetorical model. Most, if not all, of the other non-autocratic characters in the poem exhibit characteristics that might be termed tyrannical, particularly excessive anger, pride, cruelty, savagery, paranoia, excessive use of force, love of power, dissimulation (although this is often a classic response to tyranny as well) and manipulation of silence. Of the typical characteristics of the stock tyrant, only sexual lust and sexual deviance seem to be entirely

[604] On the dramatic overtones of Cicero's letter, see Gunderson (2003) 105-6.
[605] Dominik (1994) 130-80 and McGuire (1997) 147-84 are the most important discussions. Statius holds this overwhelming interest in tyranny in common with the other Flavian epicists; Pelias, Amycus, Laomedon, Cyzicus and Aeetes are all examples of tyrants in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* while Hasdrubal, Hieronymus and Hannibal all exhibit the same tyrannical characteristics in Silius' *Punica.* On these two poems, see McGuire (1997) 147-84.

absent, although Eteocles and Polynices are products of the unnatural union between *Oedipus and Jocasta*.[606] *Yet we notice that this is a common trait for all Statius' characters.* As we shall see, certain aspects of the rhetorical paradigm are avoided throughout the poem.

Employing mythical narrative as a vehicle for exploring current political debate was a common feature of Roman literature and performance from its earliest times, especially where accusations of tyranny were concerned. The earliest Roman tragedies establish an enduring connection between mythical narratives and contemporary politics; mythical plays attacked real individuals and the stereotypes of republican tragedy informed the rhetorical stereotypes used in political invective.[607] Cicero tells of the Apollinarian games of 59 BC where the audience applied the line *nostra miseria tu es magnus* to Pompey, causing uproar, and of the performance of Accius' *Tereus* in 44 BC, during which the audience was inspired by references in the play to tyranny to applaud M. Brutus as a tyrannicide.[608] The latter example confirms that old plays and old plots were constantly reinvigorated with new, contemporary, political meanings and these meanings were constructed not by authors or producers but by audiences.

With regard to our discussion of the *Thebaid*, a number of important features about the presentation of tyrants become apparent. 'Triggering vocabulary' is a key element in the stereotypical depiction, since the tyrant displays a restricted range of character traits, and Roman authors in all genres use the same limited vocabulary to describe these traits. This vocabulary aids in identifying tyrants but also reduces their individuality as characters. As we shall see, the language of the *Thebaid* is surprising novel at key moments and links the rhetorical paradigm of tyranny with the themes and vocabulary of Roman elegy. Authors

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[606] For these characteristics as typical of tyrants in ancient literature, both Greek and Roman, see Dunkle (1967); (1971); on the tyrant in Herodotus and the distinction between objective writing and conventional depiction, see Gammie (1986). For an example of a historical tyrant not characterised by sexual lust but by gluttony, cf. Tacitus' portrait of Vitellius in his *Histories*, see Ash (1999) 95-125, esp. 96-8.

[607] Dunkle (1967) 153-4 argues that the first contact came through the medium of tragedy, where the earliest Roman adaptations of Greek tragedies brought the stereotype into Roman thought.

[608] Cic. *Att.* 2.19.3; 16.2.3; *Phil.* 1.36. For further examples and discussion, see Bartsch (1994) 71-82.

frequently use facial features and expressions as a prominent element in descriptions;[609] facial features reveal innate tyrannical natures. When tyrants display expressions that are contradictory or difficult to read we can see their dissimulative nature.[610] Such a heavy and consistent reliance on conventional norms makes objective distinctions between characters difficult. Roman authors also rely on the most memorable stories about individuals not only to provoke emotional responses from their audience but also to differentiate between one character and another; normally it is the memorable wrongdoings that distinguish one tyrant from another. Mythology has a crucial role to play in the depiction of tyrants; well-worn mythological stories were used to attack contemporaries. Finally, the interpretation of the mythological tyrant as a reflection of a contemporary figure of authority was often made by the audience; both republican theatre audiences and emperors could impose the apparently unchanging depiction of the tyrant on figures from their own eras.

Cicero explores a full range of possible responses to tyranny which find their expression in Statius' poem; all of Cicero's hypothetical examples have parallels in the *Thebaid* except for his final question, which concerns his own particular position in Roman society. Yet the major difference between Statius and Cicero is that for Cicero, the autocratic rule of the tyrant is not an inevitable feature of political life and Cicero seeks to eliminate autocratic rule in Rome. For Statius, the political map is transformed. After a century of imperial rule, Rome had obvious parallels with Statius' Thebes, where one tyrannical ruler is rapidly succeeded by another often equally bad, equally short-lived, and equally difficult to distinguish from his predecessor. Good rulers are rare exceptions. For Statius' Rome, there is no obvious escape from autocracy, and this has clear implications for the responses that one can have to tyranny in such circumstances. Like Cicero, Statius cannot escape from

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[609] Cf. Edwards (1993) 63-97.

[610] Dissimulation as a central feature of tyrant informs Tacitus', Suetonius', and Dio's accounts of Tiberius: see e.g. Syme (1952) 422-3; Zecchini (1986); Martin & Woodman (1989) 28-9; Woodman & Martin (1996) ad *Ann.* 3.2.3. It is also an important feature in all subsequent accounts of Domitian: see e.g. McGuire (1997) 150-1. Dissimulation is an important theme in Flavian literature generally: see esp. Hershkowitz (1998b) 242-74.

dealings with autocratic and tyrannical rulers. All that is negotiable in imperial Rome is one's response. Which of Cicero's *theses* should we accept?

2. Repetitive tyranny: problems with being evil.

Tyrannical imagery permeates the *Thebaid* so completely that an examination of each individual instance would prove both superfluous and invidious. We will confine ourselves to a brief examination of three prominent tyrannical figures in the *Thebaid*, Eteocles, Jupiter and Creon, and to some more general comments about the appropriation of tyrannical characteristics by other characters in the poem. Having established the character of the Statian tyrant, we can examine the way in which the epic examines the possible responses to tyrannical rule and the important part that dissimulation and suicide play in dealings with and oppositions to tyranny. Finally, we will examine the importance of elegiac language in describing the tyrant's love of power and how the generic 'contamination' in Statius' poem affects our reading of tyranny in the poem and the possible responses to it.

Statius' depiction of tyranny in the *Thebaid* is broadly consistent with the conventions of rhetorical tyrants elsewhere in Roman literature; but Statius' epic (as is the case with all Flavian epic) has its own peculiar version of the rhetorical stereotype of tyranny, one which selects certain aspects of the tyrannical paradigm and applies them to its characters with great consistency. Suffice to say that Statius boils the depiction of tyranny down to its barest essentials. The language of *saevitia* dominates the poem; there are 151 instances of *saevus, saevire* and their cognates in the poem and Statius tends to employ one of these at all the key moments in the epic. The sexual excess that forms such a prominent part of so many Augustan, Neronian and post-Flavian depictions of tyranny (often indicated by use of the term *libido*) and the desire to acquire wealth (indicated by *avaritia*) have diminished importance.[611] Greed in the Statian concept of tyranny is the desire for power

[611] No cognate of *libido* occurs in Statius, and there is one use of the adjective *avarus*, at *Theb.* 1.339. Nor is this merely a rejection of 'unpoetic' vocabulary; cf. Ovid's Tereus' *libido*, *Met.* 6.458, 562.

alone; despite a few hints that wealth may be a future issue for Thebes' rulers, the *Thebaid*'s tyrants are only ever hungry for the right to rule. Moreover, sexual lust is re-configured as lust for power; the *Thebaid* uses the language and generic expectations of erotic elegy to inform his tyrants' lust for power. Statius' epic allows us an uncluttered view of the tyrannical pursuit of power: 'by examining the Roman experience in the laboratory of a materially deprived Thebes, Statius strips bare the moving cause of the imperial epic, the desire for power, fuelled by the basic epic emotion anger.'[612]

The sense that the tyrannical Statian protagonists are motivated by a singular and simple desire is further expressed in what follows the famous simile of the bulls describing Eteocles and Polynices in Book 1 (131-6). Thebes is not a kingdom worth fighting for. Instead, the brothers are fighting for power pure and simple (*sed nuda potestas | armavit fratres, pugna est de paupere regno*, 1.150-1). *Paupere* heightens the paradox and underlines that the brothers are only driven by power. The description of the kingdom of Thebes (1.144-9) has another function beyond revealing the simplicity of this conflict. The passage also makes an intertextual point. Two fragments of the Cyclic *Thebaid* survive about why Oedipus cursed his sons:

> αὐτὰρ ὁ διογενὴς ἥρως ξανθὸς Πολυνείκης
> πρῶτα μὲν Οἰδιπόδηι καλὴν παρέθηκε τράπεζαν
> ἀργυρέην Κάδμοιο θεόφρονος· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
> χρύσεον ἔμπλησεν καλὸν δέπας ἡδέος οἴνου.
> αὐτὰρ ὅ γ' ὡς φράσθη παρακείμενα πατρὸς ἑοῖο
> τιμήεντα γέρα, μέγα οἱ κακὸν ἔμπεσε θυμῶι,
> αἶψα δὲ παισὶν ἑοῖσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπαράς
> ἀργαλέας ἠρᾶτο, θεὰν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινύν·
> ὡς οὗ οἱ πατρώϊ' ἐνηέϊ ⟨ἐν⟩ φιλότητι

[612] Hardie (1993) 95.

δάσσαιντ', ἀμφοτέροισι δ' ἀεὶ πόλεμοί τε μάχαι τε

(*Thebais* fr.2)

ἰσχίον ὡς ἐνόησε χαμαὶ βάλεν εἶπέ τε μῦθον·
'ὤι μοι ἐγώ, παῖδες μὲν ὀνειδείοντες ἔπεμψαν ...'
εὔχτο Διὶ βασιλῆϊ καὶ ἄλλοις ἀθανάτοισιν,
χερσὶν ὕπ' ἀλλήλων καταβήμεναι Ἄϊδος εἴσω.

(*Thebais* fr.3)

Yet Statius follows the plot of Euripides' *Phoenissae* in his presentation of the motivation for Oedipus' curse:

quin ecce superbi
– *pro dolor!* – *et nostro iamdudum funere reges*
insultant tenebris gemitusque odere paternos.

(*Thebaid* 1.76-8)

Statius' Oedipus bases his curse and his prayer to Tisiphone for vengeance upon the lack of respect that Eteocles and Polynices have shown towards him and not on offences caused during scenes of feasting. Few, if any, modern scholars have challenged Vessey's view that: 'we may dismiss from our consideration without diffidence the Cyclic *Thebaid*; even if Statius could have read it (which is dubious) nothing is less likely than that he would have found it of the remotest use.'[613] Vessey's argument is probably based on a practical perspective: we gain more from studying complete texts than a handful of ancient fragments. Moreover, we know that Statius' version of the Theban myth was rich in original material. Yet our lack of knowledge of the Cyclic *Thebaid* should not put us off this question completely. After all, our own ignorance of the ancient epic is as likely to prompt our view

[613] Vessey (1973) 69. Cf. Vessey (1970a) 118n.1.

that it had no use for Statius as is anything else. Instead, we should recall the persistent tradition that attributed the ancient *Thebaid* to Homer and the interest shown in the poem by Athenaeus, whose *Deipnosophistae* provides fragment 2. Pausanias (9.9.5) writing in the late 2nd century AD tells us that the 7th century elegiac poet Callinas attributed it to Homer and that several ancient authorities agree (although Pausanias' phrasing suggests that he is not one of them) and moreover that he regards the text as the most admirable ancient epic after the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, suggesting that Pausanias knew a complete version of the poem. Such a text might plausibly have interested a poet like Statius who proudly asserts his knowledge of obscure poets including Epicharmus, Ibycus, Alcman, Stesichorus, Lycophron, Sophron and Corinna (*Silvae* 5.3.151-8), even if he could not make much use of it.

When Statius returns to the cause of the conflict a little later in book 1, the details he evokes in demonstrating that Thebes is not a rich kingdom certainly strikes a chord with a reader familiar with the cyclic fragments. The poet illustrates the nature of Thebes by informing the audience that it lacks wealth, specifically gold, marble and jewels:[614]

> et nondum crasso laquearia fulva metallo,
> montibus aut alte Grais effulta nitebant
> atria, congestos satis explicitura clientes;
> non impacatis regum advigilantia somnis
> pila, nec alterna †ferri statione gementes†
> excubiae, nec cura mero committere gemmas
> atque aurum violare cibis: sed nuda potestas
> armavit fratres
>
> (*Thebaid* 1.144-51)

[614] The passage evokes Sen. *Thy.* 446-70, where Thyestes praises his simple and humble life in contrast to the fearful state of the autocratic ruler. Here Statius plays on the contrast; tyranny is rife *even* in this humble kingdom. Contrast also the conflict between Lucan's Caesar and Pompey, for whom the entire world's wealth is insufficient (*BC* 1.109-11), see Schiesaro (2003) 108-9.

Most commentators focus on the end of this passage. *Nuda potestas* motivates the conflict. But it is interesting to note the possibilities for conflict against which *nuda potestas* is opposed; Statius' Thebes lacks the very things that one would expect the stereotypical tyrant of Roman rhetoric to get excited about; there is no motivation for *avaritia* (both Vespasian and Domitian were notorious for *avaritia*). Yet this absence is expressed in terms which may key the alert reader into realising that Statius makes more than a point of political theory. The phrase *mero committere gemmas* is at least suggestive of the cup of Laius in the cyclic fragment, while the striking use of *violare* in the phrase *aurum violare cibis* may conflate ideas from both fragments. The word *nondum* often has a metapoetic effect in Statius' epic,[615] and beginning the passage with *nondum* has a striking double effect, indicating a story from an uncivilised age, while creating the impression that Statius' narration of events somehow has priority over that cyclical version and fights against its secondary status.[616] *Nondum* may also indicate that wealth may be a reward for the victor in the future, but what follows suggests that the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices is precisely what will prevent Thebes from accruing wealth (*dumque uter...et vitae mortisque pudor*, 1.152-5).

Statius' subtle intertextual play makes an important point. He asserts his poem's authority over the cyclic epic by making a reference to the striking differences between the two poems' definitions of what motivates the conflict.[617] Statius' epic asserts its authority to move away from Greek literary precedent and create its own vision of Thebes and more importantly, his own vision of tyranny; Statius reduces the conflict to its most basic element, *nuda potestas*. This is a novel move on Statius' part; his is a depiction and discussion of

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[615] Cf. 12.1 where *nondum* marks the *Thebaid*'s lack of closure with reference to the end of the *Aeneid*; 12.529 where it introduces a sense of generic conflict in the 'civilisation' of Hippolyte. See p.216 above. Ovid plays a similar game in his depiction of another man with a 'sinful' table, Lycaon. *quae pater ut summa vidit Saturnius arce, | ingemit et, facto nondum vulgata recenti | foeda Lycaoniae referens convivia mensae*, *Met.* 1.163-5. The story is not yet famous within the poem because it has only just happened but it is known well enough by the external audience that Ovid need only make this oblique reference to it until Jupiter relates the story to the divine council, 1.209-43.

[616] *Nondum* also resonates awkwardly with Tisiphone's *adsueta...nube* at 1.124. Statius acknowledges the secondariness of his poem by referring to the Fury's countless efforts to arouse *furor* in Roman epic. On secondary epic, see Hinds (1998) 91-8.

[617] Compare Statius' interaction with Homer in his narration of the ambush of Tydeus (see above, p.102) and of the suicide of Maeon (see below, p.270).

tyranny without many of its juicier attendant trappings. Eteocles may gain wealth by being king of Thebes (and Tydeus hints at this, *satis ostro dives et auro | conspicuus tenuem germani pauperis annum | risisti*, 2.406-8, although there may be an element of rhetorical exaggeration in this, given that Polynices is now prince of Argos), but emphasis on this point is avoided. Statius' approach is not entirely unique, of course; both Silius and Valerius Flaccus make similar moves, although neither gives their novel depictions of tyranny the programmatic force that it has in the *Thebaid*.[618] Yet in a rhetorical and philosophical sense, the shift away from *libido* and *avaritia* as central aspects of tyranny is rather bold, as it takes away from the tyrannical character of rhetoric the most appealing elements of: 'a colourfully evil personality imbued with immorality.'[619] Statius' tactic of reducing his tyrants' motivations to a *saevus amor regendi* means that he loses the biggest opportunity to make his tyrants into entertaining and memorable evildoers.

As a character, Eteocles' most prominent attribute is that he lacks individuation. Eteocles' misdeeds in his time as tyrannical ruler of Thebes are rarely memorable and indeed are glossed over by Statius. Moreover, Creon becomes virtually a carbon copy of Eteocles when he rules Thebes; his character is transformed suddenly and thereafter repeats what we have seen in Eteocles. Nor should we place too strong a distinction between Eteocles and his brother. They are different because of circumstances, not through differences in character.[620] Polynices shares his brother's tyrannical attributes, especially *furor*, arrogant pride, and an overwhelming obsession with power (cf. 1.316-23; 2.313-32; 3.365-82; 6.316-26; 11.97-112, 497-573). Eteocles displays most of his tyrannical characteristics in the episode describing Tydeus' diplomatic mission to Thebes, the failed ambush that Eteocles sets for him, and Maeon's return to Thebes and suicide before the king (2.383-3.113).[621] When Tydeus comes before Eteocles, the latter is every inch the tyrant of rhetoric:

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[618] Cf. Kleywegt (2005) 28: 'Valerius Flaccus' view of the world is decidedly not as pessimistic as that of Statius or the one presented in Seneca's tragedies.'
[619] Dunkle (1967) 158.
[620] Cf. esp. Dominik (1994) 79-83.
[621] Cf. Frings (1991) 27-39, 44-8. On Eteocles as tyrant, see Dominik (1994) 83-8; McGuire (1997) 157.

ibi durum Eteoclea cernit

sublimem solio saeptumque horrentibus armis.

iura ferus populo trans legem ac tempora regni

iam fratris de parte dabat; sedet omne paratus

in facinus queriturque fidem tam sero reposci.

(*Theb.* 2.384-8)

Statius packs in a number of tyrannical commonplaces. Eteocles is harsh in character (*durum*), sits apart from his people, surrounded by weapons, and high (*sublimem*) on his throne.[622] His harsh rule activates the link between wild animals and tyranny (*ferus*) and he is 'ready for every crime' (*omne paratus | in facinus*). Yet despite insistence on his harshness, Statius gives no details of Eteocles' misdeeds. Tydeus' speech (2.393-409) angers Eteocles, but he hides his feelings with a classic piece of tyrannical dissimulation (*ast illi tacito sub pectore dudum | ignea corde fremunt*, 2.410-11) and makes a very long and rhetorically powerful speech (2.415-51).[623] Yet this subtlety fails to get the better of (the equally angry) Tydeus who interrupts Eteocles and continues to shout even as he leaves the palace (2.452-69). One suspects that Eteocles' dissimulation was not all that difficult for Tydeus to read. Even before Eteocles' speech, Tydeus identifies with unerring precision the reason for Eteocles' refusal to abandon Thebes (*dulcis amor regni blandumque potestas*, 2.399; cf. 1.127-8, 150; 11.655-6) and the epithet with which Tydeus' second speech ends suggests that he guesses Eteocles' intent (*violente*, 2.466). Eteocles' failure to dissimulate successfully is not unusual, but it is the ability of Tydeus and Maeon to see through the

[622] Statius may be playing with the *topos* that tyrants live in high places while democracies are more suited to the plains, Arist. *Pol.* 1330b17-20; cf. Ogilvie (1965) ad Livy 2.9.1-3; Kraus (1994) ad Livy 6.18.14; 40.10. For the tyrannical implications of a bodyguard, cf. Tacitus' Tiberius, who first rejects a bodyguard, *Ann.* 6.2, but then requests one, *Ann.* 6.15; cf. also Suet. *Tib.* 65; Dio 58.10, 13. Cf. Frings (1991) 29-39.

[623] On the phrase *tacito sub pectore*, cf. Frings (1991) 38 and n.87.

tyrant *and* prevent him from achieving what he intends that is surprising.[624] By contemporary standards, Tydeus' performance seems improbable while Eteocles is something of a weakling.

A similar process occurs soon after, when Maeon brings news to Eteocles (3.58-77).[625] This time Eteocles' facial expression reveals his typically tyrannical anger and he uses the henchmen who surround him:

> iam moveret iras
> rex ferus, et tristes ignescunt sanguine vultus.
> inde ultro Phlegyas et non cunctator iniqui
> Labdacus (hos regni ferrum penes) ire manuque
> proturbare parant.
>
> (*Theb.* 3.77-81)

The same epithet (*ferus*) indicates Eteocles' tyrannical nature. In addition, he is surrounded by evil men, another feature typical of tyrants.[626] Again, the tyrant reveals himself too soon; Maeon commits suicide before Eteocles' men have a chance to capture him (3.81-91). Again, we should not be surprised by Eteocles' failure to dissimulate successfully but by the fact that his dissimulation does not allow him to achieve his evil intentions.[627] Denied an opportunity to exercise his tyrannical wrath, Eteocles commits the worst deed still available to him and forbids Maeon's burial (3.96-8, esp. *sed ducis infandi rabidae non hactenus irae | stare queunt*), just as Creon will forbid the burial of the Argive

[624] On the frequency with which dissimulation fails, see Hershkowitz (1998b) 264-70; on Valerius' Jason seeing through Pelias but abiding by his demands all the same, *Argo.* 1.64-6, see Hershkowitz (1998b) 246-7.

[625] Further discussion of Maeon's suicide follows below, p.270. Cf. Frings (1991) 44-8.

[626] For the tyrant typically removing good men around him and surrounding himself with men of similar character, see Plato *Rep.* 567b-c; Xen. *Hiero* 5.2; Arist. *Pol.* 1314a4-5; Vell. Pat. 88.2 with Woodman (1983) *ad loc.*; Tac. *Ann.* 3.7.1 with Woodman & Martin (1996) *ad loc.*; 4.1.2 with Martin & Woodman (1989) *ad loc.* For fire imagery associated with Statius' tyrants, cf. 2.411, 9.12, 11.525; for Polynices portrayed as Phaethon, cf. Lovatt (2006) 32-9.

[627] By comparison, Valerius' Jason sees through Pelias' dissimulation, *Argo.* 1.38-9, but not that of Aeetes, *Argo.* 5.532-3. In *both* instances, the tyrant gets what he wants: see Hershkowitz (1998b) 245-9.

dead at the end of the poem (12.94-102).[628] The young king is angry because he missed an opportunity to show his true nature. Ironically, Eteocles is so tyrannical that it costs him opportunities to display his character by committing evil deeds; Tydeus and Maeon both confound their tyrannical opponent because they read Eteocles well and are able to resist him. Yet the embassy of Tydeus in books 2 and 3 reveals another aspect of Eteocles' tyranny, the absence of really scandalous stories about his reign. The ambush ought to be an opportunity for Eteocles to excel himself as tyrant. Instead it is Tydeus who covers himself in glory and Maeon who earns the narrator's respect through his noble suicide. The opening of Book 3 exposes another aspect of Eteocles' tyrannical nature that he might have kept hidden:

> at non Aoniae moderator perfidus aulae
> *nocte sub ancipiti, quamvis umentibus astris*
> longus ad auroram superet labor, otia somni
> accipit; invigilant animo scelerisque parati
> supplicium exercent curae; tum plurima versat,
> pessimus in dubiis augur, timor. 'ei mihi' clamat,
> 'unde morae?'...
> vario sic turbidus aestu
> angitur ac sese culpat super omnia, qui non
> *orantem in mediis legatum coetibus ense*
> perculerit foedasque *palam* satiaverit iras.
>
> (*Theb.* 3.1-7, 18-21)

[628] For Tacitus' criticism of the Flavian army for leaving bodies unburied after the battle and sack of Cremona, see Ash (1999) 63-5.

Eteocles displays all the paranoia, cowardice and fear that proverbially plague tyrants and is often exemplified in their inability to sleep.[629] Yet further irony is apparent. It is Eteocles' tyrannical desire to dissimulate and to keep things hidden that confounds him. He castigates himself for his failure to kill Tydeus openly (*palam*). The psychological conflict that keeps Eteocles awake (*vario sic turbidus aestu | angitur*) mirrors the conflict between his need for secrecy and his need for slaughter. Ultimately, Eteocles will fail at open expression of his anger a second time, when Maeon kills himself publicly. Instead of a tyrant who horrifies and entertains in equal measure through his deeds, Statius presents us with an implausible tyrant who struggles to tyrannise because of his own tyrannical nature.

Despite his efforts to tyrannise, Eteocles also displays characteristics that sit uneasily with the rhetorical model. Twice in the poem, Eteocles demonstrates a concern for religious ritual that goes entirely against the standard ancient vision of the hubristic, irreligious tyrant. In Book 4, Eteocles is terrified by a portentous speech made by the queen of the Bacchanals predicting the civil conflict with his brother (4.377-405). Eteocles' response is to beg Teiresias to reveal the will of the gods to him. Teiresias informs Eteocles that the quickest way to discern divine will is to summon the spirits of the dead (4.406-14). Eteocles has little part to play in a process that is dominated by Teiresias, his daughter Manto and the ghost of Laius (4.414-645), but he is mentioned again after the initial sacrifices and Teiresias' first, terrifying prayer (4.461-86):[630]

> dixerat, et pariter senior Phoebeaque virgo
> erexere animos; illi formidine nulla,
> quippe in corde deus; solum timor obruit ingens
> Oedipodioniden, vatisque horrenda canentis
> nunc umeros nunc ille manus et vellera prensat
> *anxius inceptisque velit desistere sacris.*

[629] Paranoia is the quality that perhaps best typifies Domitian's tyranny, cf. e.g. Suet. *Dom.* 14-16, esp. 14.4 on the polished palace walls that enabled Domitian to see anyone behind him.
[630] Cf. *tremuere rogi et vox terruit ignem,* 4.472.

qualis Gaetulae stabulantem ad confraga silvae
venator longo motum clamore leonem
exspectat firmans animum et sudantia nisu
tela premens; gelat ora pavor gressusque tremescunt,
quis veniat quantusque, sed horrida signa frementis
accipit et caeca metitur murmura cura.
atque hic Tiresias nondum adventantibus umbris:

(*Theb.* 4.488-500)

Statius paints an incongruous picture of the terrified young king next to the steadfast old man and his daughter. Moreover, the picture of Eteocles cowering behind Teiresias and clutching at him is undeniably comical, while the simile of the hunter and lion reverses the expectation that the tyrannical Eteocles will show bestial characteristics. The roles are reversed, Teiresias playing lion while Eteocles (who presumably has his eyes closed in terror) blindly measures the seer's chanting (*caeca metitur murmura cura*).[631] However, the punch line to this comedy appears in line 500, where we discover that the spirits have not yet appeared; Teiresias must deliver another eighteen lines of prayer before the dead appear (4.501-18). Eteocles has been hiding merely from the sound of the seer's voice. While fear is undeniably a strong element in the presentation of the tyrant in ancient literature, Eteocles seems ridiculous here; he is scarcely a figure to elicit fear from the audience.

Eteocles encounters similar problems as he sacrifices to Jupiter in Book 11 of the poem (11.205-38). The Theban king offers thanks to Jupiter for the thunderbolt that killed Capaneus, but Jupiter is not present and Tisiphone redirects his prayer to 'the Jupiter of the Underworld' (*Tisiphone... | inferno praevertit vota Tonanti,* 11.208-9). Eteocles offers an apparently immaculate prayer but black fire leaps from the altar, consumes his crown and

[631] The choice of *murmura* and the pronounced alliteration of 'm' and 'c' in these words might even suggest that Teiresias is not speaking very loudly.

the bull being sacrificed breaks free and scatters the worshippers (11.226-30). Teiresias *consoles Eteocles:*

> diffugiunt famuli, et regem solatur haruspex.
> *ipse instaurari sacrum male fortis agique*
> imperat, et magnos ficto premit ore timores.
>
> (*Theb.* 11.231-3)

The seer's reaction continues the role-reversal visible in book 4. Here it is Teiresias who turns the tables against Eteocles and dissimulates (*ficto ore*), by hiding his true emotions (*magnos timores premit*), beginning the sacrifices again and lying about the (rather obvious) evil portents. It is not that Teiresias chooses dissimulation as a response to tyranny that is remarkable but rather that he succeeds so easily.[632] The Theban tyrant is not doing his job terribly well; his concern for religious observance in the midst of battle is extraordinarily pious, as the messenger Aepytus notes when he informs the king of his brother's challenge outside the walls (*rumpe pios cultus intempestivaque, rector, | sacra deum*, 11.242-3). Eteocles fails to live up to his billing.

Eteocles is not consistently presented in such a dismal light; at the beginning of book 9 he leads his troops to good effect, capturing the body of Tydeus (9.1-95). Yet in the battle between Thebes and Argos, Eteocles has only a cameo role until his duel with Polynices. Statius focuses his attentions upon the Argive heroes and not the Theban tyrant. Ultimately, it is only in fighting his brother that Eteocles finds his strongest affiliation to the tyrannical character. Between the initial challenge by Polynices and the acceptance by Eteocles, there is a long chain of encouragement and dissuasion for the brothers; Creon and especially the Furies succeed in impelling an act that Eteocles' courtiers, Antigone, Jocasta, Adrastus and the goddess Pietas can only delay (11.257-536). Yet at the climax of the duel,

[632] Again, see Hershkowitz (1998b) 264-70 on the failure of dissimulation.

the essential nature of Eteocles and Polynices takes over and the Furies need only stand back *and watch in admiration:*

> nec iam opus est Furiis; tantum mirantur et astant
> *laudantes, hominumque dolent plus posse furores.*
> fratris uterque furens cupit adfectatque cruorem
> et nescit manare suum;
>
> (*Theb.* 11.537-40)

However, the natural ferocity and savagery of the tyrannical character has been redirected towards a different end. The evil of mutual fratricide eventually proves far more threatening, destructive and horrifying than Eteocles' rather ineffective tyranny. Creon's speech of encouragement to Eteocles to fight his brother (11.262-96) lays bare the destruction that Eteocles' reign has brought upon Thebes; Eteocles has not been an evil ruler *for Thebes because of tyrannical character but because his conflict with Polynices has cost* so many lives. Further irony is born of that fact that it is Creon's overwhelming grief for Menoeceus that motivates him to urge Eteocles onto death (11.264-7, esp. *urit fera corda Menoeceus*). Even more paradoxical is Eteocles' apparent inability to understand the concept of dissimulation in others. Creon's speech (11.269-96) is brazen and uncompromising in its condemnation of Eteocles as ruler; it surely could not be misunderstood. Yet Eteocles does misunderstand, assuming that Creon feels no grief for his son and instead aims for the throne:

> sic pater infrendens, miseraque exaestuat ira.
> *ille sub haec, 'non fallis' ait 'nec te incluta nati*
> fata movent. canere illa patrem et iactare decebat,
> sed spes sub lacrimis, spes atque occulta cupido
> his latet: insano praetendis funera voto,

meque premis frustra vacuae ceu proximus aulae.

(*Theb.* 11.297-302)

Eteocles unwittingly predicts the change that Creon will undergo when he accedes to the throne, but for the moment his own tyrannical paranoia leads him to misjudge Creon. Eteocles accuses Creon of a trick (*non fallis*) that his uncle has simply not intended. Eteocles' response to Creon recalls the opening of Menoeceus' dissimulative speech to his father in book 10:

quin et monstrantibus illis

fraude patrem tacita subit avertitque timorem:

'falleris heu verosque metus, pater optime, nescis.'

(*Theb.* 10.720-2)

The reversal accentuates the irony in Eteocles' misunderstanding. Menoeceus deflected his father's fear by use of a dissimulative speech that begins with *falleris*. Eteocles deceives himself when Creon's emotion should be obvious (*infrendens, miserque exaestuat ira*) and begins his speech of self-delusion with *non fallis*. The exchange produces further irony; claiming to have seen through Creon's dissimulation, Eteocles goes ahead with the duel that, so he believes, Creon wants so that he can claim the throne (*non ita Sidoniam Fortuna reliquerit urbem, | in te ut sceptra cadant...sed arma, | arma prius, famuli!*, 11.303-4, 305-6). Moreover, he commits another act of dissimulation to restrain his own anger (*ensem, quem iam dabat ira, repressit*, 11.309). Creon aims not for power but for revenge for his son's suicide. Menoeceus' suicide, whatever its shortcomings, and the mutual fratricide are placed in stark contrast both by Creon's emotional speech and by Eteocles

himself (*tanto indignissime nato*, 11.304). Eteocles' misguided 'decoding' of Creon's dissimulation leads him towards the very act that he should avoid.[633]

Eteocles displays many standard tyrannical traits, but his character is more strongly defined by the sense that he fails to be an effective tyrant. Eteocles fails to live up to the rhetorical paradigm of tyranny that he imitates; he regularly shows anger or even regret that he cannot achieve all tyrannical ends available to him; in many ways his tyrannical behaviour is self-defeating. The nature of Statius' presentation of Eteocles also elicits surprising responses; the Theban tyrant is incompetent and occasionally even comical and most unlike the deadly tyrants of Rome. It is not his tyranny which horrifies but the duel with his brother. Eteocles is not the only ruler to display tyranny in this form. In the divine sphere, Jupiter is another tyrannical ruler who might be charged with a measure of incompetence and this has been the focus of two penetrating articles by Hill.[634] Statius delays the introduction of the king of the gods into his narrative until Oedipus' curse, Tisiphone's intervention and the brothers' natural predisposition all combine to set in motion the events that will lead to the mutual fratricide, only to present a full council of the gods (1.197-302) in which Jupiter announces his intentions to create war between Thebes and Argos. It is interesting to note that Jupiter mentions nothing of fraternal conflict, and his inability to anticipate that event (11.496) is telling. Clearly, Jupiter is characterised as a tyrant,[635] but also as a weak figure whose actions are unable to match the power implied by his speech. He evokes his tyrannical counterpart in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (although Statius' scene lacks many of the more direct allusions to contemporary politics that one sees in Ovid's passage), and his speech is shot through with Ovidian allusions (*Met.* 1.163-261).[636] In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid portrays Jupiter in command of the Fates (1.209-43,

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[633] Compare this exchange with that of Jason and Pelias in book 1 of Valerius' *Argonautica*, where Jason sees through Pelias' deceit but accepts his mission anyway. See Hershkowitz (1998b) 246-7.
[634] Hill (1990); (1996); also Hershkowitz (1998a) 260-6. What follows is a supplement to Hill's analysis of Jupiter, especially as regards his power to motivate the conflict at Thebes. Statius' presentation of Jupiter as tyrannical and incompetent closely follows Ovid's presentation of Jupiter in the *Metamorphoses*: see Anderson (1989).
[635] See Feeney (1991) 353-7; Dominik (1994) 7-16.
[636] See Feeney (1991) 353-4; Dominik (1994) 4-16, 164; cf. Anderson (1989) esp. 93-4.

esp. 240-3), decreeing that all humanity must suffer (1.242). The Ovidian gods and minor deities give their assent either by rapturous approval or stony silence (*1.199-206, 244-5*) and none dare to disagree (1.167, 177-80, 205-8).[637] Statius' Jupiter matches his Ovidian counterpart in bombast, but lacks his authority. Ovid's Jupiter had already destroyed Lycaon and his house before the Ovidian council had begun (*Met.* 1.230-9) while Statius' Jupiter has achieved nothing. Moreover, Statius' Jupiter does not command the unswerving consent of the other gods; most of the council is taken up with the protests of Juno (*Theb.* 1.248-83),[638] and Bacchus later complains as the war begins (7.145-92). He implies that the Fates are at his command, but nowhere is this made explicit. Statius' Jupiter is less effective than his Ovidian counterpart and the differences between them emphasise this. His ambitions are rather more limited, only desiring the destruction of two houses on earth (*nunc geminas punire domos, quis sanguinis auctor | ipse ego, descendo, Theb.* 1.224-5).[639] Note also how Statius' Jupiter figures his tyrannical destruction of Thebes and Argos as *self*-destructive; these are, literally, *his* houses. Jupiter is as much participant in civil war as he is instigator and, ironically, he indicates his blending of participation with instigation with the word *auctor*. Statius' king of the gods demonstrates his relative weakness with a subtler allusion to Ovid's work:

> taedet saevire corusco
> *fulmine, iam pridem Cyclopum operosa fatiscunt*
> bracchia et Aeoliis desunt incudibus ignes.
>
> (*Theb.* 1.216-8)

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[637] Although Ovid's Jupiter is powerful, he is also incompetent. See Anderson (1989) 96-8 on *Met.* 1.231-2, and below on Jupiter's inability to use thunderbolts effectively.

[638] Juno's speech maintains the intertextual play by alluding to various Ovidian episodes (Argis and Io, Danaë, Semele).

[639] *The inevitable logic of Jupiter punishing 'twin houses' in a poem of war between twin brothers is* nicely balanced by the intertextual play with Ovid's Jupiter speaking on his destruction of Lycaon's one house as a prelude to destruction on a much grander scale, *occidit una domus, sed non domus una perire | digna fuit, Met.* 1.240-1.

Beyond the obvious language of tiredness and enervation,[640] these lines remind us of the Ovidian Jupiter's unwillingness to use thunderbolts (*Met.* 1.253-65) in case the heavens should catch fire. His fear is caused by a decree of Fate that the heavens would be consumed by fire and forces Jupiter to flood the earth instead. Statius' Jupiter is unaware of Fate's decrees and is unable to do the thing that characterises Jupiter best, to hurl a thunderbolt. Moreover, his weakness is expressed as an inability to tyrannise because he cannot act savagely, that is, in the most basic tyrannical manner (*taedet saevire*). His weakness and inability to affect the events in the narrative culminates in Book 12, when it is Theseus who takes Jupiter's place as the figure most likely to effect some form of resolution in the narrative.[641]

Statius' Jupiter appropriates the discourse of the prologues of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, using the same terminology (shunned in Statius' own prologue) that both earlier epicists use to list the causes of the conflicts in their poems.[642] *Aeneid* 1.1-34 briefly explains Juno's anger with Aeneas in answer to the poet's request (*Musa, mihi causas memora*, *Aen.* 1.8) and *Aeneid* 7.37-40 also requests Erato's help for the causes of conflict in Italy (and is quite historiographical in tone). Lucan's exposition (*fert animus causas tantarum expromere rerum*, *BC* 1.67) is much longer and more complex, linking the main cause of civil war, the breakdown of the triumvirate (*BC* 1.68-158 esp. *hae ducibus causae*, 1.158), to the underlying causation that was the breakdown of moral value in Roman society itself (*suberant sed publica belli | semina*, *BC* 1.158). Lucan's exposition of causes in his historical epic follows the model of Thucydidean historiography by pairing a central cause with underlying factors.

Statius' Jupiter is clearly influenced by these programmatic moments in Roman epic and key phrases in his two speeches are tinged with the vocabulary of earlier epic prologues. In his first speech he claims that Polynices' marriage to Adrastus' daughter will sow the

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[640] Cf. Hershkowitz (1998a) 247-301.
[641] See especially *Theb.* 12.650-5 and Feeney (1991) 357.
[642] Franchet-D'Espèrey (2001) 190-2, 194.

seeds of war. At the end of the scene he declares that these events will be the causes of anger, which he will shape:[643]

belli *mihi* semina sunto
Adrastus socer et superis adiuncta sinistris
conubia.

(*Theb.* 1.243-5)

hinc causae irarum, certo reliqua ordine *ducam*

(*Theb.* 1.302)

Jupiter is simply too late, however, and Oedipus, Tisiphone and human psychology have already set events in motion of which the king of the gods seems blissfully unaware. There is irony in that the marriage of Polynices to Argia is not even a genuine cause of war. At worst, Jupiter has involved Argos in the war, but Polynices' marriage is really only a condition of the enactment of war in a particular manner; the brothers would have fought anyway.[644] The unusual future imperative *sunto* presages disaster, but the syntax of the sentence adds to the sense of randomness; Jupiter might have followed this with whatever he wanted.[645] The personal pronoun *mihi* reflects Jupiter's inadequacy. These events are only *semina belli* and *causae* in the eyes of Jupiter (literally 'for him'). Statius and Oedipus have

[643] Note also how *certo reliqua ordine ducam* appropriates the language of fate and destiny, although Jupiter's claim to control fate is dubious at best.

[644] Franchet-D'Espèrey (2001) 195, 197. Marriage may also tap into a sense of Jupiter's being too late or mistimed in any event; in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' future marriage to Lavinia dominates the latter half of the poem and is crucial to the *end* of the poem; in Lucan's epic, Julia's marriage to Pompey is depicted as the last possible bond that might avert civil war (*BC* 1.111-20) and her death *before the poem begins* removes a final obstacle to the poem's progress. Statius' Jupiter goes against the grain of epic poetry.

[645] For *sunto* carrying a sense of impending doom in epic, cf. esp. Dido's curse of Aeneas' people, *nullus amor populis nec foedera sunto*, Virg. *Aen.* 4.624; Jupiter swearing an oath to Semele, Ov. *Met.* 3.290; Caesar's rejection of peace as he crosses the Rubicon, *procul hinc iam foedera sunto*, Luc. *BC* 1.226; Dis' later but seemingly more effective curse, *nostrique haec omina sunto | prima odii*, Stat. *Theb.* 8.69-70. *Sunto* also used at Virg. *Aen.* 6.153; Ov. *Met.* 5.222.

already given us the real ones and Jupiter has not realised this. The irony is heightened by *Jupiter's repetitious behaviour. He repeats themes from Oedipus' speech (1.56-87):*

> ille tamen superis aeterna piacula solvit
> *proiecitque diem, nec iam amplius aethere nostro*
> vescitur; at nati (facinus sine more!) cadentes
> calcavere oculos. iam iam rata vota tulisti,
> dire senex. meruere tuae, meruere tenebrae
> ultorem sperare Iovem.
>
> (*Theb.* 1.236-41)

Jupiter reiterates the complaints of Oedipus (*at nati... cadentes | calcavere oculos*; cf. 1.46-87) and claims that now his prayers have been fulfilled (Oedipus has already complained of Jupiter's neglect, 1.79-80). Jupiter's repetitions in his speech mimic the essentially repetitious nature of his actions. Moreover, Jupiter's over-use of rhetorical emphasis in his speech emphasises how little he has done; Jupiter is all talk. *Iam, iam reminds us that Jupiter has not done anything yet; the repetition of meruere is highly* rhetorical and both seem especially ironic now that Oedipus has already called up Tisiphone.[646] Further irony can be found in Jupiter's belief that Oedipus has atoned for his crimes (236). The phrase *dire senex* and the synecdochic reference to Oedipus as *tenebrae* unwittingly makes Oedipus appear to be an earthly Fury more than a humble old man;[647] even Jupiter's speech hints that Oedipus' vengeance is carried out by chthonic, and not heavenly, forces.

Following the council, Jupiter sends Mercury to fetch the ghost of Laius from the *Underworld to plant semina belli in Eteocles. Human psychology and infernal forces* undermine the independence of Jupiter's plot. He freely admits that Eteocles will happily

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[646] See *OLD* s.v. *iam* 5. On repetition of *iam*, very common in Statius, see Wills (1996) 106-7; for the repetition of verbs as essentially rhetorical, see Wills (1996) 102-6, esp. 103.
[647] See Hardie (1993) 62-3.

fight his brother (*quod sponte cupit*, 1.300, cf. 1.126-30) and that his innate predisposition towards *nefas* is already at work.[648] Moreover, the convoluted method of inciting Eteocles' anger[649] suggests both Jupiter's reliance on chthonic forces (he needs the ghost of Laius) and the unnecessary repetition embodied in this failed chain of causation. Statius involves Jupiter into the narrative of Theban history so as to suggest both his tyrannical nature and his inability to live up to the demands of that character type. In the same manner as Eteocles and Creon after him, his tyrannical intentions are met by instant dissent, here from Juno (1.250-92). Statius thus provokes a strong contrast between his Jupiter and those of Ovid and Virgil.[650] Juno's speech highlights Jupiter's own sexual misdemeanours (1.251-8) and in particular his link to Thebes through Semele (*illam odimus urbem | quam vultu confessus adis, ubi conscia magni | signa tori tonitrus agis et mea fulmina torques*, 1.256-8). Juno suggests that in the past, Jupiter thundering in Thebes had a different meaning. Her accusation accentuates the essential difference between Statius' vindictive yet incompetent Jupiter and his *alter ego* of literary precedent, Jupiter the adulterous lover. The irony is that we might expect sexual misdemeanours from a tyrannical Jupiter, but instead Statius creates a Jupiter who goes against type. We will see neither sexual excess nor much in the way of competence from Jupiter. Other forces, notably the chthonic forces such as the ghost of Laius, Jupiter's brother Dis and especially the Furies steal his thunder. Jupiter's ability to keep things moving does not improve as the epic progresses; book 7 opens with an angry request for Mars to start war between Argos and Thebes no less than three years after Jupiter's council (7.1-33);[651] Jupiter displays his power in his destruction of Capaneus, but is unavailable to accept Eteocles' prayer shortly after, a prayer which Tisiphone redirects to Hades (*11.208-9*).

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[648] Cf. Franchet-D'Espèrey (2001) 197: '[Jupiter] s'appuie sur la psychologie humaine, sur une haine et un conflit préexistants.'
[649] Jupiter sends Mercury to Tartarus to fetch the ghost of Laius who then appears to Eteocles in dream, first as Teiresias, then as himself (*Theb.* 1.303-11, 2.1-70, 89-119).
[650] Cf. Ahl (1986) 2837-41.
[651] See Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

With the death of Eteocles, the stage is clear for Creon to assume power (Jupiter has also disappeared from the narrative). Yet Eteocles' uncle is an identical replica of his nephew; the assumption of power entails an assumption of the mantle of tyranny, one which comes with its attendant problems. Eteocles' moments of incompetence are seemingly brought about by the tyrannical condition, not by any innate defect. The successor to the Theban throne undergoes an identical process of transformation as his nephew:

> et iam laeta ducum spes eluisse duorum
> res Amphionias alio sceptrumque maligna
> transtulerat Fortuna manu, Cadmique tenebat
> iura Creon. miser heu bellorum terminus! illi
> pugnarant fratres. hunc et Mavortia clamant
> *semina, et impensus patriae paulo ante Menoeceus*
> conciliat populis. scandit fatale tyrannis
> flebilis Aoniae solium: pro blanda potestas
> et sceptri malesuadus amor! numquamne priorum
> haerebunt documenta novis? iuvat ecce nefasto
> stare loco regimenque manu tractare cruentum.
> quid, melior Fortuna, potes! iam flectere patrem
> incipit atque datis abolere Menoecea regnis.
> *primum adeo saevis imbutus moribus aulae*
> (indicium specimenque sui) iubet igne supremo
> arceri Danaos, nudoque sub axe relinqui
> infelix bellum et tristes sine sedibus umbras.
>
> (*Theb.* 11.648-64)

Creon's assumption of power is marked by the sense of near-perfect repetition of the beginning of conflict in book 1. Creon's transformation from grieving parent into tyrannical

maniac is almost instantaneous, and occurs the moment the sceptre comes to him, the moment he takes hold of 'Cadmus' laws' (*sceptrum, 11.649; tenebat, 11.650;* cf. *sceptra tenentem*, 1.140) and the moment he ascends to the throne (11.654-5). The description of Creon's absolute authority reworks the memorable phrases of book 1 and 2 (*blanda potestas | et sceptri malesuadus amor*, 11.655-6; cf. *regendi | saevus amor*, 1.127-8; *nuda potestas*, 1.150).[652] As Creon becomes king, he is instantly imbued with savage customs (*saevis imbutus moribus*, 11.661). The transformation is extraordinary; Creon instantaneously forgets his grief and his son (*iam flectere patrem | ...regnis*, 11.659-60).[653] The major difference between Creon in book 11 and Eteocles and Polynices in book 1 is the absence of Tisiphone. Statius offers no supernatural explanation for Creon's sudden descent into tyranny. Noting the similarity of both episodes in the poem and the repetitiousness of Statius' Thebes is nothing new, but the consistency of the comparison between these moments in books 1 and 11 is remarkable even by Statian standards. Creon assumes tyranny almost as though donning the tragic tyrant's mask. Creon becomes almost indistinguishable from his predecessors. His first action as king, forbidding burial to the Argive dead, is undertaken not simply for the sake of cruelty but as an example of his tyrannical nature (*indicium specimenque sui*, 11.662). Creon is almost depersonalised by becoming king, he is transformed into a walking exemplar of Theban tyranny, without any individual character of his own.

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[652] *Malesuadus* is rare in Latin; Plautus uses it in at *Mostellaria* 213, *illa hanc corrumpit mulierem malesuada vitilena*; Virgil makes an altogether more sinister use in describing Hunger in the Underworld at *Aen.* 6.276, *malesuada Fames*; both Statius and Silius use it of potentially more positive qualities, cf. Sil. *Pun.* 14.501, *heu puero malesuada rudi nova gloria pugnae*.

[653] Although the corrupting influence of absolute power is a cliché, the transformation from a good character to one of unmitigated evil is all the more surprising when one considers the difficulty that Plutarch has in depicting a change from good to evil character, cf. Gill (1983) 478-81 with Plut. *Arat.* 51-3; *Sulla* 30.4-5; *Sert.* 10.3-4, and the emphasis that Tacitus places on the conscious choices that the tyrannical Tiberius makes towards evil, cf. esp. Gill (1983) 486: 'Tacitus' concern is rather to show that Tiberius' vices express a mature consciousness, and reflect deliberate choice.' Gill (1983) draws a distinction between 'character' and 'personality' where character reflects an evaluation of the person as the possessor of good or bad qualities while personality aims to evaluate the person psychologically in a morally neutral way. Gill notes that all the ancient authors whom he assesses more or less consistently analyse individuals according to a 'character-viewpoint', that is to say, through moral evaluation. It makes for an interesting comparison with Statius' Creon whose 'personality' as grieving parent is utterly erased by the 'character' of tyrant.

Failure and repetitiousness haunt Creon during his brief reign. He repeats features of *Eteocles' interaction with Tydeus, Maeon and Teiresias as he sends Oedipus into exile.* Creon attempts to hide his fear and anger, but Oedipus sees through Creon easily; his response to Creon's sentence of exile is a speech that reveals Oedipus' total comprehension of the nature of tyranny at Thebes:

> mox reducem Ogygiae congressus limine portae
> *Oedipodem extimuit paulum, seseque minorem*
> confessus tacite, promptamque coercuit iram;
> sed redit in regem caecumque audentius hostem
> increpitans, 'procul,' inquit, 'abi, victoribus omen
> invisum, et Furias averte ac moenia lustra
> discessu Thebana tuo. spes longa peracta est:
> vade, iacent nati. quae iam tibi vota supersunt?'
> horruit instinctu rabido, steteruntque trementes
> *ceu visu praesente genae, seniumque recessit.*
> tunc natam baculumque manu demisit, et irae
> innixus tumido vocem de pectore rumpit:
> 'iamne vacat saevire, Creon? modo perfida regna
> fortunaeque locum nostrae, miserande, subisti,
> et tibi iam fas est regum calcare ruinas?
> iam tumulis victos, socios iam moenibus arces?
> macte, potes digne Thebarum sceptra tueri.
>
> *(Theb. 11.665-81)*

The exchange between Creon and Oedipus repeats many of the features of Eteocles' interactions with those around him. Creon is momentarily afraid, but hides this and, dissimulating, hides his anger. Yet the blind Oedipus plays Teiresias, rejecting the

instruments of his old age and responding with such force that we are reminded of the seer's swollen chest when he is literally 'filled by Apollo' (*tumido vocem de pectore rumpit*, 11.676; cf. *quippe in corde deus*, 4.490).[654] Creon's dissimulation is instantly exposed as Oedipus identifies all the commonplaces of his tyrannical nature (*saevire, perfide, Thebarum sceptra*). Despite Oedipus' angry response, Antigone makes a conciliatory speech (11.708-39) that mollifies Creon somewhat. He only banishes Oedipus as far as the wild lands around Thebes (11.748-54; an apt place for a wild man?) before returning to his throne. One last moment of irony occurs at this point; Creon fails to spot the dissimulation going on around him, as his courtiers and the Theban populace feign assent with his decisions (*et ficto comitum vulgique gementis | adsensu limen tumidus regale petebat*, 11.755-6).[655] Both as producer and reader of dissimulation, Creon is as poor as his predecessor. His incompetence in this regard is in strong contrast with the dissimulative emperors of Rome.

Creon's inability to control events around him by means of tyrannical behaviour is reflected in the cremation of Polynices by Argia and Antigone.[656] We should reiterate in passing the extent to which wife and sister acquire characteristics that might in another individual be marks of tyranny (especially Antigone's *furor, ira* and resemblance to a lion, 12.356-8). Thus do Argia and Antigone appropriate the language that one might expect to be adduced to Creon. The new tyrant's failure to restrain the women from providing Polynices with a funeral is expected. What is startling is Creon's further inability to execute the women even though that is what they desire (*ambae hilares et mortis amore superbae | ensibus intentant iugulos regemque cruentum | destituunt*, 12.679-81); Argia certainly survives to the poem's end (*ut saevos narret vigiles Argia sorori*, 12.804) and although Antigone's fate is uncertain, she may also escape her traditional fate.[657] Statius leaves open

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[654] *Tumido* is also suggestive of Oedipus having one last moment of puffed-up, tyrannical pride (cf. *OLD* s.v. *tumidus* 5, 6), especially as Creon is called *tumidus* as he returns to his throne, 11.756.
[655] Eteocles also suffers similarly from his people when Tydeus leaves his court. The people curse Tydeus openly and Eteocles secretly, *saevoque infanda precantur | Oenidae tacitoque simul sub pectore regi*, 2.480-1.
[656] Above, p.87.
[657] See Hershkowitz (1998a) 296n.109.

the possibility that, contrary to literary precedent, Antigone escapes death, courtesy of an *incompetent tyrant.*[658]

A further tyrannical strand runs parallel to Statius' presentation of inept tyrants and that is how far tyrannical characteristics are appropriated by other individuals in the *Thebaid* whose status is never tyrannical. We have already seen how acquiring and displaying *virtus* regularly makes individuals behave monstrously. However, this monstrosity is the traditional preserve of the tyrannical figure in ancient rhetoric and literature. Statian heroes, in other words, are taking the tyrannical away from the tyrants. Tydeus is arguably the best example of this pattern. Throughout the epic he is consistently compared to various monstrous and bestial figures (a bull, which further likens him to Eteocles and Polynices, snake, eagle, wild boar, centaur and Briareus) and his defining moment in the poem is his cannibalistic feasting on the brains of his killer, an act which actualises the tyrannical 'feasting with the eyes' on the severed heads of enemies that delights historical figures such as Sulla.[659] Similarly, Capaneus displays the hubristic qualities normally associated with tyrannical rule, and, like Tydeus, ultimately expresses his defining character trait by physically breaching the heavens.[660] Both heroes exemplify a wider pattern, where the worst and most 'tyrannical' deeds in Statius' epic are not performed by the tyrants themselves.

Statius' tyrants lack the interest value that is such a strong feature of tyrants elsewhere in Roman literature (for example, Virgil's Mezentius is famed for horrible tortures and Seneca's Atreus feeds Thyestes his children). The impression is of characters going through the required motions; Statius' tyrants are filled with and fuelled by *furor* and *ira*, they commit dastardly deeds, are silent, paranoid, watching all their subjects and interacting by dissimulative means. Yet they hardly seem frightening. Rather they seem caricatures of the rhetorical stereotype of the tyrant, displaying rather 'flattened' characters that lack

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[658] Leaving people alive can, of course, be more cruel than killing them, cf. Lucan's Caesar to Domitius, *'vive, licet nolis, et nostro munere' dixit | 'cerne diem.'*, *BC* 2.512-13; Maeon laments his *vita inerti*, *Theb.* 3.695, see below, p.269; Hippomedon to Panemus, *'vive superstes'*, *Theb.* 9.294, cf. Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*; Hulls (forthcoming). Here, however, Creon clearly intends to kill and is interrupted, *leto | admovet*, 12.678-9.

[659] See above, p.119.

[660] See Feeney (1991) 352, 358-9.

individuation and also undermining themselves by their incompetence. Eteocles' audiences with Tydeus and Maeon are marked by his tyrannical behaviour; he stays in his citadel, hides his true emotions, is surrounded by evil henchmen and gets others to do his dirty work. Yet no one is fooled; both Tydeus and Maeon see through Eteocles. Eteocles plots the ambush of Tydeus, an undeniably evil act but one that goes disastrously wrong. Worse still, the ambush is memorable not for Eteocles' tyrannical behaviour but for Tydeus' superhuman performance in battle and for Maeon's noble suicide. In the fighting against the Argive army, Eteocles can be seen leading his men in battle and organising what will ultimately be a victory for Thebes. Yet the poem's focus on Argive warriors, the seven against Thebes and the noble suicides of Dymas and Menoeceus overshadows his leadership. The most hubristic character on display is not the tyrannical Eteocles but the irreligious Capaneus. It is ironic that the true tyrant displays great concern for the divine, constantly asking Teiresias for signs of divine will. Eteocles makes the greatest impact on the narrative by fighting his duel with Polynices, another instance where Eteocles fails to achieve what he intends, and it is somewhat ironic that his death in mutual fratricide is the true evil that the *Thebaid* depicts and not his tyrannical life. As a tyrant, Eteocles is something of a flop.

Nor does Jupiter appear terribly competent in his direction of tyrannical affairs from heaven. He displays, like his Ovidian predecessor, all the trappings of tyrannical authority, yet he has none of the power. The war he desires seems rather unnecessary and Jupiter rarely seems capable of driving the action. He consistently seems one step behind Tisiphone, allows years of delay in starting his war, and fades into the background before its conclusion. In going against literary precedent, Statius' Jupiter mimics his implausible tyrants.

Creon apparently does little better. He is a carbon copy of Eteocles from the moment he becomes king and commits the terrible sin of leaving corpses unburied, a sin that Eteocles had already committed in leaving Maeon unburied. Yet the speed of Creon's transformation into a tyrant is matched by the speed at which Statius' narrative casts him aside. Theseus rapidly appears to slaughter Creon and restore order. Moreover, Creon matches Eteocles in

incompetence; Statius omits Antigone's fate after burying her brother which plays down the one order for which Creon is most famous. Statius leaves Argia and Antigone unpunished; we are meant to suspect that Creon never quite completed this tyrannical act before Theseus finishes him off.

Displaying these tyrannical figures as caricatures may undermine them as individuals but it also deconstructs the rhetorical stereotype that they represent. Because we recognise Eteocles, Creon and Jupiter as representative of the rhetorical paradigm we can also discern an undermining of that paradigm. Statius' poem does not disempower tyranny altogether; rather it redistributes tyrannical behaviour and power to other characters within the poem. The sense that Statius' tyrants fail to display proper tyrannical behaviour is paralleled by how far character traits normally the preserve of the evil tyrant are displayed by virtually all of the major protagonists in the *Thebaid.* Polynices (himself a would-be tyrant, of course), Tydeus (who acts as a double for Eteocles in Book 1), Hippomedon and Capaneus all display excessive *ira*, *furor*, *saevitia*, monstrous characteristics, pride, bloodlust and excessive use of force. Like Eteocles and Creon, they lack the sexual proclivities and financial greed that one might expect of tyrants in other forms of literature but otherwise they are tyrants in every respect of their behaviour but not in status. In this sense, 'tyranny' as a characteristic follows the trend that we have seen elsewhere in the poem; like the goddess Clementia in Athens, the authority of 'tyranny' is undermined; like *virtus*, it is at once immensely and cruelly powerful but also self-destructive; like *pietas*, it struggles to distinguish between men who ought to be polar opposites. As ever in the context of Theban civil war it is a quality that spreads itself throughout all the participants in the conflict; as we shall see in a moment, even a hero such as Menoeceus displays hints of tyrannical behaviour. The lack of individuation that the tyrants display is a cornerstone of tyranny as a characteristic in Statius' poem; it contaminates all who fight for Thebes. All can become tyrants in some sense.

Statius' depiction of tyranny subtly but suggestively alters the standard rhetorical model. Statius bucks a strong literary trend in modifying the image of tyranny. He is not

alone; all three Flavian epicists present tyranny in innovative ways, but Statius is perhaps the most radical of all.[661] How far the alteration of the rhetorical model is peculiar to Flavian epic is demonstrated by how quickly the traditional model reasserted itself following Domitian's death. Martial's eleventh book of epigrams was produced for the Saturnalia in AD 96, that is, only three months after Domitian's assassination on the 18th September of that year.[662] Martial only mentions Domitian occasionally in the book, but his depiction of the previous emperor conforms to the traditional and not the Flavian epic model of tyranny. Domitian is noted for his sexual misdemeanours, especially hypocritical in the light of his tightening of the *Lex Julia de adulteriis* in 89/90 AD (Mart. 11.7; cf. Suet. *Dom.* 22), his execution of Vestals (Suet. *Dom.* 8), his jealous murder of the *pantomimus* Paris in 83 AD and the subsequent murder of many of his supporters (Mart. 11.13). Domitian is already remembered as a classic tyrant and not like the tyrannical rulers of Statius' epic.

3. Dissimulation, dissent and the disarming of tyranny.

The presentation of tyranny in the *Thebaid* is unexpected; it runs against the grain of imperial politics, especially the politics of Domitian's reign and especially with regard to the dominant position *dissimulatio* appears to have held both within the discourse of Domitianic politics and within the historical record of Domitian's reign.[663] Life under such an emperor demanded not only that an individual be prepared to accept and understand an emperor's dissimulation but also to dissimulate in return:

> 'The emperors, especially Tiberius, Nero and Domitian, were expert dissimulators, and those living under them were forced into similar

[661] See McGuire (1997) 147-84.
[662] See Kay (1985) ad Mart. 11.33.
[663] On the centrality of dissimulation in imperial politics under Domitian, see Ahl (1984) 78, 82; Coleman (1986) 3115; Rudich (1993) xxii-xxiii; McGuire (1997) 159-60; Hershkowitz (1998b) 264-70. Cf. Bartsch (1994) 63-97 on the related notion of allusive doublespeak. Cf. also related discussion in Lendon (1997) esp. 107-75.

behavioural patterns as the growing need for politically expedient *'friendships', particularly with the emperor, resulted in a heightening of the* dissimulation necessary for sustaining such pretences ... Being friends with an emperor was a very difficult and not wholly enviable proposition, and one which required great dissimulative skill.'[664]

Yet the model of dissimulative relationships within the *Thebaid* does not match the *realities of political life in the world for which Statius was composing. In both worlds,* dissimulation is an everyday reality and an essential aspect of dealing with autocratic rulers. Yet unlike the Roman emperors, Statius' tyrannical rulers lack a real understanding of the subtleties of dissimulative speech. Furthermore, the way in which inferiors deal with dissimulating rulers seems to be equally different from the Roman reality. Responses to dissimulation are marked by strong emotions. Tydeus' angry reply to Eteocles sees him interrupting, repeating himself in his anger before storming out in mid-speech, grinding his teeth and throwing his olive branch away in disgust (*et orsa | iniecit mediis sermonibus obvia: 'reddes,' | ingeminat 'reddes', 2.451-3; 'nos poscimus annum! | sed moror.' haec audax etiamnnum in limine retro | vociferans*, 466-8; *talis adhuc trepidum linquit Calydonius heros | concilium infrendens...ramumque precantis olivae | abicit*, 476-9). It is difficult to imagine someone behaving this way before a real tyrannical emperor and surviving; Tydeus' response reads like a fantasy of how one might wish to respond to an autocratic ruler. In a sense, Tydeus' blunt speaking is as excessive and heroic as his defeat of fifty warriors, and just as implausible. Maeon's final words before his suicide mimic Tydeus' disgust at delay and likewise break off in mid-speech (*'neque enim ipse moror', 3.77; 'te superis fratrique...' et iam media orsa loquentis | absciderat, 3.87-8).* Creon similarly abuses Eteocles in a long speech of recrimination (11.269-96) marked by his emotional state (*ardens | ecce aderat luctu dicturusque omnia belli | libertate Creon,*

[664] Hershkowitz (1998b) 268-70, citing Dio 57.2-5 on Tiberius' dissimulation as a classic example of the difficulties involved.

11.262-4; *infrendens, miseraque exaestuat ira*, 11.297). He in turn is abused by Oedipus who rediscovers lost energy in his attack on the new tyrant (*instinctu rabido, 11.673; abducit genitor saevumque minatur | indignans veniam. qualis leo rupe sub alta*, 11.740-1). All these responses to dissimulative speeches from tyrants are linked by the heightened emotion that underpins them and the absence in these responses of any further dissimulation. A pattern emerges whereby the dissimulating tyrant is confounded by the lack of dissimulation and the unbridled release of emotion in the response. The angry and frank reply tends (improbably) not to provoke a violent response from the tyrant but rather elicits another classic tyrannical character trait, that of fear. Eteocles' *concilium* is frightened by Tydeus (*trepidum, 2.476), Maeon's suicide provokes a fearful response from Eteocles' court, if not* explicitly from Eteocles himself (*excussae procerum mentes, turbataque mussant | concilia*, 3.92-3), Eteocles fears for his power after Creon's speech and Creon himself fears the very sight of Oedipus.

Parallel to these responses to dissimulation are the broader criticisms of tyranny by Theban citizens, the unnamed critic in book 1 (168-96) and Aletes in book 3 (176-217). The '*aliquis*' (1.171) of book 1, offers an analysis and condemnation of the system of alternating that mirrors Statius' own exposition in previous lines (compare 1.125-63 with 1.168-96).[665] *Yet despite the similarity in their opinions, Statius' presentation of the critic appears rather* harsh:

> iam murmura serpunt
> *plebis Echioniae, tacitumque a principe vulgus*
> dissidet, et, qui mos populis, venturus amatur.
> atque aliquis, cui mens humili laesisse veneno
> summa nec impositos umquam cervice volenti
> ferre duces
>
> (*Theb.* 1.168-73)

[665] Ahl (1986) 2628-30.

We have an obvious difficulty in reconciling Statius' apparently negative depiction of this critic with the fact that the critic's views are so similar to that of the narrator. Statius' negative implications are predicated on the consistency of the opposition to rule rather than the particular criticisms of Eteocles; there are some who always criticise new rulers, no matter what their qualities. However, '*aliquis*' appears to be using the only weapon available to him and his attack on Eteocles is undeniably powerful (*nec impositos...duces*) and mimics other frank responses to tyranny. Statius may have a literary motivation, as the speech of '*aliquis*' acts as a parallel to Oedipus' speech at the very beginning of the poem (1.46-87). Oedipus' curse merits an immediate divine response, the infection of Eteocles and Polynices by Tisiphone. The critic's speech is also immediately followed, without any obvious link or break, by divine action, the council of the gods (cf. *tibi, summe deorum | terrarumque sator, sociis hanc addere mentem | sedit?* 1.178-80) which, in combination with the other determining forces in the narrative will move the critic's cause forward. '*Aliquis*' wants to see Polynices return (*tamen ille precanti | mitis et adfatu bonus et patientior aequi*, 1.189-90). We should be wary of his motivation; he wants Polynices purely because he is the exile; '*aliquis*' seems unaware that Polynices has the potential to be as bad as his brother. His lowly venom is to be criticised both as a part of the over-determined pattern of causation in book 1 and as a piece of partisan criticism that misunderstands the nature of tyranny in Thebes. '*Aliquis*' lacks intelligence and, moreover, his criticism appears to be futile. The populace grumble about their rulers throughout the *Thebaid* but never achieve change. Yet we should not dismiss his attack on Eteocles altogether; the unnamed man certainly displays a commendable spirit and, by virtue of his anonymity carries a certain everyman quality.

However, the problem of authorial response to public criticism of Eteocles becomes even greater in book 3 when an old man named Aletes at the burial of the fifty who fought against Tydeus blames Eteocles for the undeserved deaths of his fellow citizens (*nunc regis iniqui | ob noxam inmeritos patriae tot culmina cives | exuimus, 3.206-8;* concern for wasted lives of the people is a topos of civil war). The name Aletes is richly suggestive. The old age

of Statius' Aletes (*grandior aevo*, 3.176) is reminiscent of Aeneas' companion of the same name (*Aen. 1.121; 9.246, 307*), but the Greek ἀλήτης has greater resonance.[666] In Homer, the word is used (only in the *Odyssey*) only to refer to vagabonds or beggars (especially Odysseus himself, of course). In Greek tragedy, the word is used to refer to exiles (who, like Orestes or Oedipus, regularly return in disguise or with their identity uncertain).[667] The name suggests Aletes' lowly status but also, given the association of the Greek word, a possibility of a hidden identity. Statius' response to Aletes' public criticism of Eteocles is wonder and praise:

> haec senior, multumque nefas Eteoclis acervat
> *crudelem infandumque vocans poenasque daturum.*
> unde ea libertas? iuxta illi finis et aetas
> tota retro, seraeque decus velit addere morti.
>
> (*Theb.* 3.214-17)

Statius' varied authorial comment on these dissenting voices seems inconsistent. Statius implies that Aletes' age allows him the freedom to criticise, that Aletes has nothing to lose by attacking Eteocles publicly. Yet Statius' comment is perhaps somewhat disingenuous; the suggestion is made that the punishment for criticism is death, even if, in Aletes' case, that death would come so late in his life that it would not be much of a punishment. Ultimately, Aletes' opposition to Eteocles achieves little; popular criticism of the tyrant never brings political change. At most it brings martyrdom. Aletes' criticism is at least worthy of praise; he does not make the partisan comments of the anonymous critic in book 1, but his opposition is equally ineffective. Moreover, his own motivation for criticism

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[666] Cf. Hershkowitz (1998b) 246-55. Hyginus has an Aletes as son of Agamemnon. Velleius cites the name Aletes for the founder of Corinth, 1.3.3. A scholion on Pindar (sch. Pind. *Nem.* 7.155a) tells the story of an Aletes who begged for food in Corinth and was given only a clump of earth and later became king of Corinth. *Theb.* 3.213 *terraque insternar avita* may be an oblique reference to this myth. Cf. the Homeric allusion in Maeon's name (see below p.270).

[667] For Homeric usage, see *LS* s.v. ἀλητεία; for examples in tragedy, cf. e.g. Aes. *Ag.* 1282; *Choe.* 1042; Soph. *OC* 50, 746; Eur. *Heracl.* 224; *Supp.* 280.

seems a little cynical (*seraeque decus...morti*), rather undercutting the authorial praise. The rather different reactions of the authorial voice to the critic and Aletes will merge in his reaction to the suicide of Maeon which, as we shall see below, merits both praise and criticism.

Like Aletes, the unnamed critic is of lowly status (he is one of the *vulgus*) and both offer similar criticism of Eteocles, despite the apparently different responses to that criticism from the narratorial voice. Moreover, both the unnamed critic (*aliquis*) and Aletes carry some suggestion of a hidden identity. The similarity of the unnamed critic's and Aletes' criticism to that of the narrator suggests that both stand for Statius' authorial voice; Statius stages his own criticism of Eteocles (a possible response to tyranny) within the narration of his poem and proceeds to dissect that criticism. Statius' negative and positive reactions are both somewhat undermined; both are made to seem somewhat extreme. In reality, Statius stages two possible reactions to criticism from the populace and undercuts both. Both the critic and Aletes are remarkable for a further reason. While neither's criticism of the monarch seems effective, neither one suffers punishment for their public condemnation of Eteocles. In this sense, their outspoken behaviour mimics the unrealistic success of frank oppositions to tyranny by Tydeus and Maeon. By criticising his own response to Eteocles, Statius effectively points up the sense in which his whole poetic project lacks realism; in order to produce a critical and open poetic response to tyrannical behaviour, Statius must situate his criticism within an epic mythological environment.

Statius creates a world where honest responses to tyrannical dissimulation provide the best outcomes. As such, his depiction of tyranny differs even from that of the other Flavian epicists. Comparison with the contemporary historical and political context must therefore be guarded. Statius invites comparison with contemporary Rome through his description of Eteocles as a Roman *princeps* at odds with his people (*tacitumque a principe*

vulgus | *dissidet*, 1.169-70).[668] Yet the nature of Eteocles' quasi-principate differs from the Roman reality it reflects in that serious comparison becomes impossible. Making Eteocles a *princeps* not only invites comparison but also highlights the differences between Theban fiction and Roman reality. If we wish to read Statius' Thebes as comparable to Domitianic Rome then we must also accept that Statius' narrative is itself dissimulating, presenting us with a depiction of tyranny that does not fit comfortably with the realities of autocratic rule in Rome. A reader of Statius' epic is confronted by the stark realisation that Roman tyranny is rarely as artless as its Theban counterpart and that the uncomplicated responses to tyrannical speech are rarely as successful or as free from danger. This awkwardness helps to explain to inconsistency of the narrator's own comments. Statius' own poetic voice is difficult to take seriously because it depicts an unrealistic world where the lone dissenting voice may challenge the tyrant successfully. Statius' narrator is as much the receiver of implicit criticism as his anonymous critic receives explicit condemnation. Statius tries to have his cake and eat it. He depicts a world where opposition to tyranny is rarely fatal. However, Statius also places his own dissenting voice within the text in the twin figures of the unnamed critic and Aletes. His apparently contradictory attitude to these dissenting voices points up the absence of realism in the depiction of tyranny that both characters oppose. Statius manages to satisfy all the demands of his audience, presenting a civil war epic and a view of tyranny that is palatable to all readers, including Domitian. Our analysis of his presentation of suicide will confirm and augment this point of view, that Statius can criticise both tyrant and his opponent.

4. More dissenting voices: suicide as political opposition.

Flavian epic, like so much literature of the 1st century AD, shows, to modern tastes, an unhealthy interest in suicide. In Silius' *Punica* we see the mass suicide at Saguntum, two

[668] For the 'Romanness' of the term *princeps*, cf. Ahl (1986) 2832-4; McGuire (1997) 151n.10 who see the use of *principe* as a covert allusion to Domitian. I note in passing that Martial 11.4 makes an express contrast between Nerva as *princeps* and *dux* and Domitian as *dominus ac deus*.

attempts at suicide by the younger Scipio, a Roman killing himself at Cannae, and a number of Capuans committing suicide.[669] In Valerius' *Argonautica*, much time is spent on the suicide of Jason's parents.[670] We have already examined two suicides in book 10 of the *Thebaid*, those of Dymas and Menoeceus, to which we shall return, briefly, below, and will examine the suicide of Maeon in book 3. Both Maeon's and Dymas' suicide scenes are Statian innovations, while Menoeceus' suicide is moved to a later and more significant point in events and invested with greater import than in previous narrations of the Theban myth. Yet although suicide plays an apparently disproportionate role in Flavian epic, prominent depictions of suicide are not uncommon in Roman epic (we need think only of the Didos of Virgil and Ovid, for example), and such an excess of suicides was perhaps inevitable in the literature of the period that followed the reign of Nero, where suicide became almost a central aspect of Roman literature and Roman political life.[671]

The rate of suicides among the aristocratic elite in Rome leapt alarmingly from the accession of Tiberius in AD 14 until the death of Nero in AD 68.[672] A 'Roman cult of suicide' emerged as a reaction to the crisis in social relations between aristocratic elite and the Julio-Claudian emperors;[673] suicide became widespread amongst the upper classes by Nero's time: 'it almost assumes the status of a regulated political institution of empire, and is committed virtually automatically under certain generally recognised conditions.'[674] Hill establishes, building on the body of scholarly work on Roman suicide from the last thirty years, that Roman aristocratic suicide, characterised by 'ostentation, ritualization, political protest, and philosophical allusion', establishes a Roman's status as a moral witness in the community. Those characteristics of Roman suicide are governed by a need for aristocratic honour and the assertion of the aristocracy's right to govern the Roman state. The

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[669] *Pun.* 2.612-95; 4.457-9; 9.173-7; 11.186-8; 13.261-98; 13.374-80.
[670] *Argo.* 1.767-851.
[671] See Hill (2004) 1-31 for an overview of important issues in current scholarship on Roman suicide. See also Grisé (1982); Griffin (1986a); (1986b); van Hooff (1990); Plass (1995); Hill (2004) *passim* on all aspects of Roman suicide. On suicide in Flavian epic, see esp. McGuire (1990); (1997) 21-5, 185-229; Ripoll (1998) 375-424.
[672] Tac. *Ann.* 16.16; Dio 60.16; Hill (2004) 185.
[673] The phrase is from Griffin (1986a) 68.
[674] Hill (2004) 183 citing Plass (1995) 84.

aristocratic desire to use suicide both to demonstrate an individual's conformity to the concept of aristocratic honour and simultaneously to institute and define this concept creates the paradoxical sense that self-killing is a privileged form of execution in Julio-Claudian Rome.[675]

This superfluity of self-killing that developed amongst the aristocracy of Neronian Rome is reflected in its literature. Seneca displays an obsessive interest in suicide both in his prose writing and in his tragedies.[676] Lucan's epic poetry is dominated by both narratives and imagery of suicide; for Lucan civil war is suicide at a societal level;[677] Lucan depicts the suicide of Vulteius and his company in book 4 as a misguided attempt to secure *virtus*;[678] Cato's death is extensively foreshadowed in the work as an attack on Caesar's *clementia* and an idealised example of Roman aristocratic suicide.[679] Yet despite the prevalence of suicide in the highest echelons of Neronian society and the interest in the subject in Neronian literature, we can see strong scepticism regarding the effectiveness of suicide in the political sphere. It is this attitude that, as we shall see, dominates Statius' presentation of suicide (both political and otherwise) in the *Thebaid*. Such a sceptical view regarding the power of suicide to alter the political landscape is inherent in Lucan's presentation of suicide: 'Cato, it seems, is without any peer, or near equal, in ethical perception. While his suicide might serve to demonstrate the illegitimacy and corruption upon which the Caesarian regime rests, then, it cannot, within a state seized by *furor* and under the sway of Caesar, single-handedly recreate the ethical understanding necessary to the reconstitution of the old forms of the

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[675] It also has a practical aspect, of course, allowing, in the case of an aristocrat expecting prosecution for a serious offence, one's family to retain wealth and property that would be confiscated after an execution. The jurist Ulpian probably based his opinion that ostentatious philosophical suicide should not lead to confiscation of goods on evidence from the Trajanic and Hadrianic period, *Dig.* 28.3.6.7, see Hill (2004) 307n.8. On political suicide in Rome see esp. Griffin (1986a); (1986b); Hill (2004) 183-212 which this paragraph summarises. The quote is from Hill (2004) 184, itself a summary of Griffin (1986a) 65-6. Examples of such suicides include those of Seneca and Thrasea Paetus: see Tac. *Ann.* 15.62-4; 16.34-5.

[676] See Hill (2004) 145-82.

[677] Luc. 1.2-3; 8.556-7.

[678] On Vulteius, in particular the analogy between him and Scaeva as illustrations of misdirected *virtus* in the context of civil war, see Saylor (1990); Leigh (1997) 182-3, 218-9, 259-64; Eriksen (2002); Hill (2004) 218-21.

[679] See Hill (2004) 222-30.

Republic.'[680] This questioning of the value of even the archetypal ideal suicide in Lucan is expanded upon by his contemporary Petronius, who depicts aristocratic suicide in Neronian Rome as a ridiculous, ethically empty action: 'suicide for these characters [in Petronius' *Satyrica*] acts on one level as it always does in aristocratic Roman literature, and serves to establish the agent within some particular social role. Because in the *Satyrica* social *personae* are always transitory and ephemeral, however, self-killing becomes for Petronius' characters an essentially trivial undertaking ungrounded in any ethical reality.'[681]

Disquiet at the effectiveness of aristocratic suicide continued into the Flavian period, and was most famously articulated by Tacitus at *Agricola* 42. Suicide continues to be a prominent theme of Tacitus' account of the civil war of 69 AD, although perhaps without the dominance that it enjoys in Neronian writing and Lucan in particular.[682] The writing of contemporary authors like Martial and Tacitus suggests that suicide within upper classes remained frequent in the Flavian period, especially under Domitian. Moreover, the connection between philosophy, suicide and political protest continued and motivated the expulsion of philosophers from Rome in AD 71 and AD 94. Furthermore, Arulenus Rusticus, promoted to consular rank by Domitian, was executed in AD 92 or 93 for his biography of another famous Neronian suicide, Thrasea Paetus, and Domitian had his books burned.[683] Clearly, the Flavian emperors felt that the celebration of politically motivated suicide still constituted a serious threat to their authority.

Yet the criticisms of politically motivated suicide that developed in the Neronian period are articulated much more fully and clearly in the literature of the post-Flavian

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[680] Hill (2004) 230: see also 229-36.

[681] Hill (2004) 238. Cf. also Petronius' unconventional suicide at Tac. *Ann.* 16.19 with Hill (2004) 247-51.

[682] The most famous suicide from 69 AD is Otho: see Tac. *Hist.* 2.49; Mart. 6.32; Suet. *Otho* 12; Plut. *Otho* 17; Dio 64.15; Ash (1999) 34-5, 83-94. Cf. also the suicide of Julius Agrestis, Tac. *Hist.* 3.54 (discussed below, p.271).

[683] See Tac. *Agr.* 2; Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; Dio 67.13. Arulenus and Thrasea form two ends of a quasi-dynastic opposition to the principate under Nero and the Flavians. Thrasea's son-in-law Helvidius Priscus was executed in AD 75 by Vespasian for his protracted opposition, while Herennius Senecio, another man elevated to consular rank by Domitian, was also executed for his biography of Helvidius. Helvidius' son of the same name was also executed with Arulenus and Herennius for writing a farce which subtly attacked Domitian's separation from his wife, see Suet. *Dom.* 10.4. On the dating of these deaths: see Griffin (2000a) 61n.292.

period.[684] Suicide did become less frequent in the Flavian period, and this process continued after Domitian's assassination. In the aftermath of civil war, suicide no longer informed and reinforced the ethical stance of the aristocratic elite. Rather that ethical system collapsed into the civil conflict of AD 69 and the ostentatious suicides of the Neronian and Domitianic periods were denigrated as the products of a morally bankrupt system.[685] The most important evidence for this attitude (indeed the only instance in Latin literature where political suicide as a concept is commented upon directly) comes in Tacitus' account of ostentatious suicides at *Agricola* 42.[686] Tacitus criticises those who seek *ambitiosae mortes* as: 'no more than inflated attempts to acquire for oneself an exemplary moral stature...the practice of political suicide was no more than an empty senatorial pretension.'[687] Tacitus' remarks may have been personally motivated; he was implicated in the senatorial condemnation of both Arulenus and Senecio (*Agr.* 2-3); perhaps more important to Tacitus was the need to defend Agricola's collaboration with a tyrannical regime by rejecting suicide and making himself useful to the state. Moreover, Tacitus' accounts of the deaths of men like Thrasea Paetus and Seneca (paradoxically, given their normally austere image) reinforce the image of Neronian theatricality and decadence. There can be no question that Tacitus' condemnation of *ambitiosae mortes* does reflect the attitude of the early 2nd century AD towards suicide. His attitude in the *Agricola* develops concerns that Seneca himself had, that suicide was committed in the foolish pursuit of an *umbra virtutis*.[688]

Statius' epic poetry is sandwiched between these two conflicting views of publicly performed, politically motivated suicide. At a historical level, Statius writes his epic in a period where ostentatious aristocratic self-killing is still frequent, but in decline after the

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[684] Hill (2004) 255-9.

[685] The process begins in the immediate aftermath of the civil wars of 69, where Flavian propaganda characterised Nero as an *imperator scaenicus* and his principate as utterly corrupted by a process of 'theatricalisation': see Ripoll (1999) 140-8. This idea was concretised by writers of the second century who describe Nero and Neronian Rome consistently in these terms: see Barton (1994); Edwards (1994); Rubiès (1994).

[686] On this passage and its implications, see Hill (2004) 8-11, 253-9. For relation of this passage to attitudes towards the concept of *virtus*, see p.92. Tacitus makes an implicit connection between *virtus* and suicide that is similar to that made by Lucan in his account of Vulteius' suicide, that the *virtus* displayed in such ostentatious deaths is fundamentally misdirected.

[687] Hill (2004) 255.

[688] Sen. *Ep.* 74.21.

excesses of the Neronian era. At a literary level, however, Flavian epic poetry maintained the disproportionate interest in suicide of Neronian literature. The influence of Senecan tragedy and Lucanian epic is highly visible in this regard. Statius investigates the possibilities of suicide within his mythological epic framework, and depicts some of the concerns that Tacitus would later articulate more directly in the *Agricola*. All three suicides in the *Thebaid* share many of the important features of contemporary aristocratic suicides in Rome; epic poetry's capacity to remember mimics the need for a public audience for aristocratic suicides. Yet we shall see that the act of self-killing in the *Thebaid*, while worthy of remembrance, is ultimately regarded as futile and without effect.[689] Indeed, Statius reverses the momentum of suicidal imagery in Lucan, where Rome's self-destruction in civil war is figured as an act of suicide, and presents the context of civil war contaminating apparently worthy acts so that suicide becomes an act of questionable validity.

The suicides depicted in the *Thebaid* have attracted significant scholarly attention, in particular in recent studies of Flavian epic by Ripoll and McGuire.[690] Both studies have revealed much about the importance of suicide in Flavian epic in general, but both have ignored individual aspects of the suicides in the *Thebaid* in order to expose patterns common to all three Flavian epicists. McGuire's exploration of epic suicide exposes a number of important, common features.[691] These suicides in Flavian epic have a political aspect, and indeed display suicide as an act of opposition to tyranny and as an act that asserts an individual's self-control. However, in the *Thebaid*, while the deaths of Maeon, Dymas and Menoeceus all assert the individual's self-control in the most extreme way possible, the political nature of suicide only applies directly to Maeon's death and the two suicides in Book 10 can only loosely be said to be political. Furthermore, Statius depicts suicide as an act of defiance that has questionable validity. Suicide is impressive but ultimately futile. Certainly it is true that all three suicides in the *Thebaid* are cast in a pessimistic light; we have already seen the futility of Menoeceus' failed *devotio*; suicide displays a capacity to

[689] Cf. McGuire (1997) 21-5.
[690] McGuire (1997) 185-229; Ripoll (1998) 375-424. Cf. also McGuire (1990); Frings (1991) 44-8.
[691] On the *Thebaid*, see esp. McGuire (1997) 21-5, 185-9, 197-205.

silence the voice of opposition, a capacity most obvious in the case of Maeon, whose defiant speech to Eteocles is broken off in mid-sentence by his plunging of his sword deep into his stomach (*Theb.* 3.87-8).[692] Parallels can be drawn with Dymas' death, where his suicide prevents his speaking to the enemy and revealing Argive plans (10.431-40).[693] It is harder to involve the sense of silence in the death of Menoeceus, for whom speech is a weapon; he uses speech as trickery to deflect his father's concerns (10.720-34) and silences the battlefield with his speech from the walls (10.756-73), reversing the pattern seen elsewhere. Yet Menoeceus' words and suicide are misplaced and do not achieve their desired effect of destroying the Argive attack. Finally, suicides can be seen as an occasion to demonstrate poetry's commemorative power; both Maeon and Dymas are accorded extraordinarily fulsome praise by the poet for the manner of their deaths (3.99-113; 10.445-9). Yet Menoeceus' suicide is followed not by a laudatory apostrophe from the poet, but by a long speech of lament by Menoeceus' mother (10.793-814) that radically undercuts the nobility of her son's death, questioning the value of his actions and of her own.[694] She wonders what *nefas* she has done or offence to the gods (10.795); why Jocasta's unnatural children can remain in power (796-800) and why her son came to love death (804). Although Menoeceus' mother claims that she had no monster-bearing union (*non ego monstifero coitu revoluta novavi | pignora*, 796-7), Menoeceus acquires a monstrous aspect in her speech; she emphasises the snake and the Spartoi as tainted elements in his ancestry:

> nimirum Martius anguis,
>
> quaeque novis proavum tellus effloruit armis –

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[692] Maeon's suicide follows the breaking off of his speech because he intends to deceive the executioners and ensure that he commits suicide. His act in itself is one of deception. Ripoll (1998) 384 and n.45 sensibly refutes the long-standing idea that breaking off the speech creates uncertainty in the audience as to whether Maeon has committed suicide or assassinated Eteocles, a possibility rendered highly unlikely by the general context of the poem (this is about *fraternae acies* after all) and the foreshadowing of Maeon's death, 3.75-7, esp. *quinquaginta animae*. The assassination theory dates back to Barth's commentary of 1664 and is mentioned by Ahl (1986) 2889; McGuire (1990) 32; (1997) 201-2.

[693] Amphion's threat is scarcely tyrannical and Dymas' reaction of instant suicide to the offer of his life and his master's body in return for information might seem somewhat excessive.

[694] This evokes the lament of Euryalus' mother at Virg. *Aen.* 9.481-97 and points up the difference in that Euryalus is killed in a properly military context whereas Menoeceus withdrew from battle.

hinc animi tristes nimiusque in pectore Mavors,

et de matre nihil.

(*Theb.* 10.806-9)

Meneoeceus has become a sword-devouring monster (*viden ut iugulo consumpserit ensem?* 10.813); his ancestry as the heir of men who sprang from the earth becomes the impetus for his suicidal act (*tellus...hinc animi*). His mother's speech even exploits the association between suicide and silence; her own lament is broken off only because she is led away by her maids and companions:

diceret infelix etiamnum et cuncta repleret

questibus: abducunt comites famulaeque perosam

solantes thalamoque tenent, sedet eruta multo

ungue genas; non illa diem, non verba precantum

respicit aut visus flectit tellure relictos,

iam vocis, iam mentis inops.

(*Theb.* 10.815-20)

Menoeceus' mother would continue, but she herself has been silenced by her son's suicide and indeed reduced to a state of living death by her grief. Her condition horrifyingly resembles that of Oedipus at the beginning of the poem (1.46-87): a living death marked by self-mutilation, a lack of daylight, where the victim is locked away, abandoned by their children, effectively silenced. The mother is left staring inconsolably at the earth that produced her son and his suicidal impulses. We might also compare Menoeceus' mother staring at the ground with Oedipus' striking of the ground before invoking the gods of the underworld (1.55) and her ironic complaint to Jupiter (*placet hoc tibi, fulminis auctor?* 10.800) to a similar complaint by Oedipus (*et videt ista deorum | ignavus genitor?* 1.79-80).

Ironically, the suicidal Menoeceus acquires a tyrannical quality; his manipulation of speech and silence, his monstrous character and his apparently irreligious behaviour all identify him with the stereotype of the tyrant, but his success in that role separates him from Statius' tyrannical rulers.[695] So the capacity for suicide to silence and destroy is far more varied and wide-ranging than at first seemed possible. Indeed, Menoeceus' suicide plays on the expectations created by the deaths of Maeon and Dymas and other suicides in Flavian epic. It conflates the commemorative power of poetry and the silencing power of suicide in an appalling act of self-destruction that harms others.

Ripoll's study of suicide develops the political nature of self-killing and combines this with a distinctly Stoic reading of Maeon's death in the *Thebaid*.[696] Maeon becomes a hero of *libertas* (esp. 3.100-3), an *exemplum* who glorifies voluntary, Stoic death.[697] In particular Ripoll emphasises the rationality behind Maeon's suicide, that he is beloved by the gods with whom, as a seer of Apollo, he has a close affinity, Maeon's trueness to his own nature, and the posthumous reward for a praiseworthy opponent of tyranny. However, both studies underestimate how far Statius invokes stereotyped depictions of Roman (or, as will be argued, Neronian and philosophical) suicide in depicting Maeon's death. In the remainder of this section we will explore Maeon's death as a test case for this point of view.

Maeon's suicide follows Tydeus' monomachy in Book 2 of the *Thebaid*. Maeon is the only survivor of the fifty who left Thebes to ambush the Argive ambassador. Intriguingly, Maeon is only introduced after Athene restrains Tydeus from a suicidal solo expedition against Thebes itself (2.682-9). Tydeus sends Maeon back to Eteocles with a declaration of war (2.690-703). Maeon performs the role of a sacrificial substitute for Tydeus, introduced only as he takes the Argive hero's place on the return journey to Thebes. Certain characteristics of Maeon are revealed. He is introduced as *Haemonides* (692, we are

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[695] Cf. McGuire (1997) 148-61.
[696] Interestingly, Ripoll's chapter on suicide divides the act into three sub-headings: suicide before a tyrant, exemplified by Valerius' Aeson and Maeon, suicide before the enemy, exemplified by Silius' Taurea and Dymas, and mass suicide, exemplified by the Saguntines and Capuans in the *Punica*. The chapter almost entirely ignores Menoeceus.
[697] Ripoll (1998) 226-8.

to assume therefore that he is Menoeceus' nephew – suicide is clearly a family trait), that as a seer he had foreseen these events (692-3) and that his warnings were to no avail (694-5). Moreover, he is doomed to an unmanly or powerless life (*vita inerti*, 695),[698] combining his powerlessness against Fate and the fact that he does not die with his comrades in battle. In book 3, Maeon returns alone to Thebes, prompting much lamenting before he gives an aggressive account of the night's event to Eteocles (3.40-77). Maeon, facing the tyrannical king, indicates his intention to kill himself at the end of his long penultimate speech (*te diro horrore volantes | quinquaginta animae circum noctesque diesque | adsilient, neque enim ipse moror*, 3.75-7). In front of Eteocles' court, Maeon pre-empts the assault of Eteocles' guards and kills himself (3.77-98), even interrupting his own final defiant speech (note how violence overpowering speech is actualised by blood pouring from both Maeon's wound and from his mouth: *extremisque animae singultibus errans | alternus nunc ore venit, nunc vulnere sanguis*, 3.90-1). Eteocles forbids him burial (96-8), but Maeon is instead eulogised by the poet, who assures that no animal or bird will touch his corpse (99-113).

The narrator's final praise for Maeon contains its own ironies, in particular where the poet claims an inability to add to the hero's fame:

> quo carmine dignam,
> *quo satis ore tuis famam virtutibus addam,*
> augur amate deis ?
>
> (*Theb.* 3.102-4)

Such professions of poetic inadequacy are rhetorical and commonplace, but there is more to this particular rhetorical pose.[699] Maeon's suicide is, of course, Statius' own

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[698] *OLD* s.v. *iners* 3 'unmanly', 5 'powerless'. The sense of *iners* as 'lazy' or 'sluggish' seems inappropriate given Maeon's action in book 3.

[699] An obvious point of comparison is *Theb.* 1.17-33 and the general *topos* is so widespread that a footnote cannot be comprehensive. See Hinds (1998) 34-47 for a general discussion. For a different interpretation of these lines, see Ripoll (1998) 226: 'l'aveu par le poète de son incapacité d'ajouter de la *fama* au héros implique que sa *magna mors* Stoïcienne ne l'a pas seulement racheté de sa

invention and, as such, Maeon's 'fame' is due exclusively to the poet. Earlier, we mentioned that Statius bases his account of the ambush against Tydeus very loosely on the parallel account in Homer's *Iliad*, in which Maeon son of Haemon was the leader of the fifty and was spared by Tydeus.[700] Indeed, the mention of Maeon as the survivor of the ambush is the one detail that survives from the Homeric account, although Statius' Maeon (no longer the leader of the fifty) has become a seer. The irony in Statius' eulogising of Maeon's 'fame' is emphasised by obliquely identifying Maeon as *augur amate deis*, an aspect of his character that is original to Statius' epic. The fame that Maeon enjoys is an entirely artificial poetic construct. The sense that Statius' Maeon is a radical transformation of a Homeric intertext may even be implicit in the character's name. The name Maeon is suggestive of a favourite Roman moniker for Homer as 'the Maeonian'. Roman poets, including Statius, frequently refer to Homer as *Maeonius* or *Maeonides*.[701] Indeed, there was a tradition as early as the fifth century BC that Homer's father was called Maeon.[702] Although the shift from *Maeōn* to *Maeonius* requires a change in vowel length, Roman poets are often free in their treatment of the prosody of Greek nouns, especially as regards geographical expressions and proper names.[703] Given that the character is introduced as the one solidly Homeric detail in what is otherwise an utterly reworked episode, Maeon's name may reinforce the link to Homer. In other words, Statius goes out of his way both when he introduces Maeon and when he eulogises his suicide to emphasise the extent to which his character is different from his literary predecessor.[704] Statius implicates his own authorial voice in the depiction,

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participation à l'embuscade nocturne, mais l'a auréolé d'une gloire véritable qu'il ne doit à aucune intervention extérieure, humaine ou divine.'

[700] See p.102 above. Note once again how *virtus* is identified with self-destruction.

[701] As *Maeonius*: Hor. *Carm.* 1.6.2, 4.9.5-6; Prop. 2.28.29; Virg. *Geo.* 4.380; Ov. *AA* 2.4; *Rem. Am.* 373; *Ciris* 62; *Laus Pisonis* 232; Stat. *Ach.* 1.4; *Anth. Lat.* 1111.13. As *Maeonides*: Ov. *Am.* 1.15.9, 3.9.25; Persius 6.11. Maeon's more frequent epithet, *Haemonides* (2.692, 3.42) is almost an anagram of *Maeonides* perhaps also subtly suggesting transformation of Homer.

[702] See *FGrH* 4 F 5.

[703] Cf. Virgil's free variation of the first syllable of Sychaeus, with Servius ad *Aen.* 1.343 *ea licentia quae est in propriis nominibus*; Virgil's habitual shortening of the second syllable of *Aeneades* (e.g. *Aen.* 1.565, 7.616) to fit dactylic metre; Kenney (1973) 127 on Ovidian practice; Sen. *Tro.* 931 for the Latin *Sigeon* for the Greek *Sigeion* with Fantham (1982) ad 926-37; Ps.-Sen. *Oct.* 971 with Ferri (2003) *ad loc.* Statius only mentions Maeon's name once before his death, at the end of 2.693.

[704] Much as he does in introducing the notion of tyranny as obsession with *nuda potestas* (see above, p.228).

presentation and characterisation of Maeon and his death. Praise and criticism of the action of suicide are directed not only at the character within the epic, but also at the narratorial voice that directs and describes the actions of the epic. We get the distinct impression that there is something modern and Flavian about Maeon's suicide.

In fact, Maeon's suicide has all the classic hallmarks of publicly performed, Stoic suicides from the Julio-Claudian era. Maeon is as close as Statius' Theban society can get to an aristocrat, and his descent from Haemon, and thus from Thebes' royal family is emphasised. Statius certainly plays up the theatricality and social character of Maeon's death. Maeon clearly seeks as public a death as possible; he desires an audience before Eteocles (*ut primum invisi cupido data copia regis, 3.58*); he makes a long and rhetorically powerful speech of condemnation (3.59-77) before anticipating Eteocles' desire to kill him with his own suicide and final words, rhetorically and enigmatically cut off in midline (3.83-7, esp. *te superis fratrique...*); Statius makes a point of noting that Maeon's death is seen by the court of Eteocles (*excussae procerum mentes, turbataque mussant | concilia*, 3.92-3); his wife and family remove the body (3.93-5). Maeon's suicide and the manner of its performance seems remarkably similar to Tacitus' depiction of the suicide of Julius Agrestis before Vitellius:

> notabili constantia centurio Iulius Agrestis post multos sermones, quibus *Vitellium ad virtutem frustra accendebat, perpulit ut ad viris hostium* spectandas quaeque apud Cremonam acta forent ipse mitteretur. nec exploratione occulta fallere Antonium temptavit, sed mandata imperatoris suumque animum professus, ut cuncta viseret postulat. missi qui locum proelii, Cremonae vestigia, captas legiones ostenderent. Agrestis ad Vitellium remeavit abnuentique vera esse quae adferret, atque ultro corruptum arguenti 'quando quidem' inquit 'magno documento opus est, nec alius iam tibi aut vitae aut mortis meae usus, dabo cui credas.' atque ita

digressus voluntaria morte dicta firmavit. quidam iussu Vitellii interfectum, *de fide constantiaque eadem tradidere.*

(Tac. *Hist.* 3.54.2)

Like Maeon, Agrestis is allowed to leave the battlefield by an enemy; Antonius Primus ensures that the centurion is shown every aspect of the defeat of the Vitellians at Cremona. Agrestis is disbelieved, much as Maeon's story is difficult to believe (*vix credo et nuntius*, *Theb.* 3.62), when he returns with a story of astonishing and extreme slaughter.[705] The second tradition that Vitellius killed Agrestis parallels Eteocles' abortive attempt to kill Maeon. Both Maeon and Agrestis make bold speeches before they kill themselves in defiance of tyrannical rulers. Whether Maeon was in Tacitus' mind as he recorded Agrestis' death is a moot point; what is clear is that Maeon fulfils many of the requirements of a model Roman suicide. Suicide becomes an obvious point of comparison between Statius' mythological epic and Roman historiography.

Statius also ensures a further public audience for Maeon's suicide by writing it in his epic, prompting comparisons with, for example, Seneca's carefully chosen final words directed not only at the considerable group of friends he had gathered to watch his suicide, but also at a much wider literary audience.[706] Furthermore, Maeon's suicide imitates the philosophical overtones so important for Stoic suicides in the 1st century AD. Yet in place of Stoic philosophy Maeon's actions throughout book 3 have strong religious overtones. His status as seer assures that he has long foreseen his fate (3.67-9); the poet waxes lyrical about his heavenly wisdom (3.104-5); his death 'sanctifies' a road for *libertas* (*sancire viam*, 3.102); his penultimate speech before Eteocles carries with it a strong suggestion of prayer or even curse:

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[705] On the horrors perpetrated by the Flavian army at Cremona, see Ash (1999) 64-6.
[706] Cf. Griffin (1986a) 65: 'in Seneca's case, the suitability of the whole for literary treatment had already been exploited by the victim, who clearly knew his last words would be published.'

'noctis vaga lumina testor
et socium manes et te, mala protinus ales,
qua redeo, non hanc lacrimis meruisse nec astu
crudelem veniam atque inhonorae munera lucis;
sed mihi iussa deum placitoque ignara moveri
Atropos atque olim non haec data ianua leti
eripuere necem. iamque ut mihi prodiga vitae
pectora et extremam nihil horrescentia mortem
aspicias: bellum infandum ominibusque negatam
movisti, funeste, aciem, dum pellere leges
et consanguineo gliscis regnare superbus
exule; te series orbarum excisa domorum
planctibus adsiduis, te diro horrore volantes
quinquaginta animae circum noctesque diesque
adsilient; neque enim ipse moror.'

(*Theb.* 3.63-77)

Maeon is for Ripoll an epic archetype of a Stoic suicide.[707] In particular, the seer's *knowledge of Fate suggests that he is ending his life in accordance with divine will in the* manner of a Stoic *rationalis e vita excessus*. Yet the model of Stoic suicide is also subtly subverted. Stoic thinking was very clear that death must occur 'at the right time', and Maeon is very clearly 'playing catch-up' and conscious that the appropriate time for his death was on the battlefield.[708] Moreover, he is scarcely a model of Stoic calm, one feature crucial to

[707] Cf. Ripoll (1998) 376-96.
[708] On the need for self-killing to be *opportune*, see Cic. *Fin.* 3.61; Hill (2004) 36-8. Maeon's killing himself to avoid being murdered by a tyrant would surely be seen as appropriate in Stoic thought, cf. e.g. Diog. Laer. 7.130; Olym. *Ad Plat. Phaed.* 4.403. However, Maeon's speech emphasises the *inappropriateness* of his survival, *crudelem veniam atque inhonorae munera lucis*, 3.66, and his delay in joining his comrades, *neque enim ipse moror*, 'nor do I delay any longer', 3.77.

the conception of aristocratic, Stoic suicide in the Julio-Claudian period.[709] He arrives in Thebes a picture of high emotion (*iratus fatis et tristis morte negata* | *Haemonides*, 3.41-2; *timet... questibus implet agros... odit*, 3.50-2), committing suicide before Eteocles as soon as possible, not even finishing his own angry speech. This action is not the product of calm, rational thought but that of an impulsive, emotional or even irrational man; Maeon's facial features reveal his emotional state (*servantem vultus et torvum in morte peracta*, 3.94).[710] Maeon's rush towards his own self-inflicted death lacks a certain amount of dignity.[711] However, his death as the opponent of a tyrannical monarch appears to be cast by Statius' eulogy as that of a Stoic hero of *libertas*, very much in the mould of Cato:[712]

> tu tamen egregius fati mentisque nec umquam
> *(sic dignum est) passure situm, qui comminus ausus*
> vadere contemptum reges, quaque ampla veniret
> libertas, sancire viam
>
> (*Theb.* 3.99-102)

Maeon's *libertas* certainly combines a sense of political opposition with individual autonomy, the latter springing directly from the former.[713] *Comminus* underscores Maeon's bravery by suggesting that the typical way to deal with a tyrant was *eminus*, not confronting the tyrant at all; yet *comminus* also disingenuously and ironically suggests hand-to-hand combat. Of even more concern is the religious overtone in this process; *sancire viam*

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[709] Grisé (1982) 205; Griffin (1986a) 66.

[710] Ripoll (1998) 382-5 reads Maeon's suicide as motivated by 'la choix de la raison', claiming that his oracular knowledge recalls him to rational thought, that (pp.386-7 and n.52) Maeon acquiesces serenely to his fate, and that (pp.389-90) his suicide combines heroic morality with Stoic *constantia*. This argument seems unconvincing, especially given the angry, emotional content of Maeon's speeches and that, as McGuire (1997) 203 notes, his face in death has an expression comparable to that of the tyrannical Eteocles. Maeon seems neither serene nor particularly rational and his heroic sensibility conforms to the debased sense of *virtus* prevalent in the poem.

[711] Speed and lack of dignity in suicide are also equated in Tacitus' account of Sextus Papinius' death, *Ann.* 6.49.

[712] For Cato's suicide as the highest expression of liberty and individual autonomy, see Cic. *Tusc.* 1.74; Sen. *Ep.* 24.3-4, *Prov.* 2.9-10.

[713] These notions are complementary rather than mutually exclusive, cf. Vessey (1973) 114; Ahl (1984) 283 1n.33; Dominik (1994) 154; Ripoll (1998) 391-2.

suggests that Maeon, like Menoeceus, is aping religious sacrifice, his blood purifying a path for *libertas*. It is surely right to see Maeon's death as a literary representation of Stoic suicide in opposition to tyranny, but crucially his death is self-defeating. Maeon's death may elicit praise, but it is also ultimately pointless.[714] Maeon's quasi-Stoic opposition to tyranny results merely in his self-destruction. Eteocles is none the weaker for his actions.[715] The comparison between Maeon and Cato is apposite in this regard also; Maeon's suicide also conforms in its process to the suicides criticised by Statius' contemporary Martial:

quod magni Thraseae consummatique Catonis
dogmata sic sequeris salvos ut esse velis,
pectore nec nudo strictos incurris in ensis,
quod fecisse velim te, Deciane, facis.
nolo virum facili redemit qui sanguine famam,
hunc volo, laudari qui sine morte potest.

(Martial 1.8)

Martial aims direct criticism at Cato, the figure whose death became the idealised model for suicide and at his biographer, Thrasea, himself a model for famous Flavian suicides.[716] Martial's poem and Statius' Maeon are products of the same era; both depict similar models of suicide, where *fama* is bought through suicide. Maeon is in reality just another pale imitation of Cato, the exemplary and much emulated Stoic suicide.[717] We can go further than McGuire in seeing more than a latent disquiet at the act of suicide in the isolated genre of mythological epic. Statius' depiction of political suicide is deeply involved in the rapidly changing political landscape of Flavian Rome, undermining the assertion of individual aristocratic liberty through the act of self-killing. *Fama* is of central importance to

[714] Note Statius' praise for Aletes' *libertas*, 3.216, following a speech that is equally ineffective.
[715] Contrast the pronounced effect that Agrestis' suicide has upon Vitellius, Tac. *Hist.* 3.55, esp. *Vitellius ut e somno excitus.*
[716] For the dating of this poem, see Vioque (2002) 1-8. Cf. Hill (2004) 253-4.
[717] Griffin (1986a) 68; (1986b) 194.

aristocratic suicide and the public nature of Maeon's death and Statius' praise impose extra *fama* on Maeon. The power of aristocratic suicide rests on the future reputation that suicide confers upon the individual. In a world where all responses to tyranny are unrealistically successful, the poetic voice that confers fame upon Maeon is destabilized. Statius' account is not just one of a stereotypical Roman aristocratic death situated in a mythological epic poem, but the placing of an ethical system ill-suited to its intended purpose in its epic context.

Statius' portrayal of Maeon imitates Seneca's depiction of Cato in *Epistle* 14.[718] Seneca's letter discusses the incompatibility of the life of the *sapiens* and a life in politics. Seneca constructs an argument between two interlocutors; the first (presumably representing Lucilius) suggests the younger Cato as an example of a political *sapiens*, the second questions Cato's political impact despite his wisdom:

> 'quid tibi vis, Marce Cato? iam non agitur de libertate: olim pessum data est. quaeritur utrum Caesar an Pompeius possideat rem publicam: quid tibi cum ista contentione? nullae partes tuae sunt. dominus eligitur: quid tua, uter vincat? potest melior vincere, non potest non peior esse qui vicerit.'
>
> (Sen. *Ep.* 14.13)

Seneca does not explain what he means by *libertas*, nor does he invest the term with great importance of relevance in his own writing. He regards the quality as part of a departed Republican age and of little relevance to his own imperial world. This attitude is in stark contrast to that of Lucan who makes the loss of *libertas* a central theme of his epic. As Gowing comments on Seneca: 'the memory of Cato Seneca most wishes to preserve is that of a moral *exemplum*, not as an exemplary opponent of absolutism.'[719] Like Seneca's Cato,

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[718] On *Ep.* 14, see George (1991) 243-5; Gowing (2005) 76-80. On Cato in Seneca, see Griffin (1976) *passim*; (2000c) 545; Narducci (2001). On *libertas* in Seneca, see Wirszubski (1968) 146-7; Viansino (1979) 174-87.
[719] Gowing (2005) 79.

Maeon is an exemplary figure whose opposition is worthy of poetic memorialisation. Like Cato his suicidal opposition involves him in a conflict which he cannot affect. His death is ultimately as futile as Cato's because the autocratic system of Thebes does not admit of any form of *libertas* other than the opportunity to kill oneself. Unlike Tacitus' Agrestis, Maeon's death changes nothing and his suicide is a self-destructive display of *virtus* much in the manner of Tydeus, who left him to his fate.

Statius undermines the essential end-point of any *ambitiosa mors*. Both Statius' and Martial's poetic presentations of Roman suicide work to undo its cult in Roman society. They are both elements in a wider Flavian process of radical change in Roman society at large. The deaths of men like Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio suggest that the change in Roman attitudes towards suicide was a longer and slower process than Flavian emperors might have desired, but the similarity of Tacitus' and Martial's attitudes suggests that the process had a significant impact. Statius' account acts at one remove from these direct assessments of suicide, situating Maeon's death within the distinctively poetic and artificially constructed context of mythological epic. Statius does not actively dissuade the reader from fruitless and ostentatious suicide but praises that action. Yet his praise has much in common with the (not uncomplicated) praise of Aletes that follows and the apparently harsh reaction to the criticism of *aliquis* in Book 1. These acts of defiance are all products of a poetic representation of tyranny that simplifies the historical reality it imitates; there is a gap between Statius' poetic fictions and the grim reality they represent. Likewise, Statius' own authorial comments are subject to that same gap between representation and reality; Maeon's suicide is, despite its flaws, worthy of celebration within the epic universe of the *Thebaid*, but is ineffective in altering that universe because the value system that Maeon represents has no place in Thebes. Instead, Statius' narrative of Maeon's death removes much of the impetus for self-killing as its exemplary value is undermined by its futility.

5. Elegiac enervation and the love-sick tyrant.

McGuire has noted how Flavian epic tends to describe the tyrannical ruler's behaviour and psychological state in terms more familiar from erotic elegy.[720] Love of and longing for power, silent obsessive behaviour, mental turmoil all characterise the tyrant and are all familiar poses struck by the love elegists of Augustan Rome. Tyrannical desire for power is framed in terms of erotic love (1.128; 2.399; 11.656); the alluring and seductive nature of power recalls Tibullus' descriptions of *Amor* and Nemesis (*blandus offers mihi vultus*, Tib. 1.6.1; *placido...vultu* 2.4.59; cf. *Theb.* 2.399; 11.655);[721] the silent turmoil of Eteocles (*sub pectore*, 1.125; *tacito sub pectore*, 2.410) as he struggles to contain his excessive emotions transforms the love-sickness of the elegist into something altogether darker and more violent; sickness is a metaphor that is appropriated by erotic elegy, but one that Statius re-directs towards more destructive ends.[722] McGuire emphasises the power of erotic language to unmask the tyrant, although neither the *Thebaid*'s readers nor characters within the poem appear to have great difficulty in recognising tyranny for what it is.[723] The old man in book 1 (1.186-96), Maeon (3.58-78) and Aletes (3.206-17) all recognise Eteocles as tyrant without difficulty and he is labelled explicitly as such (*tyranni*, 3.82), while Oedipus sees through Creon even as he is transformed into one and even as he dissimulates his true anger (Creon's dissimulation, 11.666-7; Oedipus' response, 11.673-707). These erotic characteristics are not necessarily a way of recognising tyranny but a transformation of the paradigm that Statius inherited. McGuire rightly acknowledges the absence of: 'the usual and definitive sexual impulses of the stereotypical tyrant.'[724] Statius compensates for

[720] McGuire (1997) 164-7.
[721] Cf. Hor. *Odes* 4.3.2-3 *Melpomene...placido lumine*; Tac. *Hist.* 2.12, *blandiebatur coeptis fortuna*. McGuire (1997) 165 erroneously refers to Ovid and misquotes the Latin.
[722] McGuire (1997) 167. It seems that Statius' appropriation of typically erotic and elegiac language acts as an indication of his poem's authority to dominate and in this instance corrupt other generic forms. On the connection between *mollitia* and tyranny, see Edwards (1993) 63-97.
[723] McGuire (1997) 165-6.
[724] McGuire (1997) 164.

the absence of the most recognisable feature of tyranny by eroticising what remains; the tyrant's *libido* is re-directed towards an obsessive repetition of his love of power.

The opening description of Eteocles and Polynices vying for the throne of Thebes lays the foundations for all the subsequent descriptions of tyranny in the poem. Tisiphone infects the brothers with a sudden tyrannical desire for power:

> atque ea Cadmeo praeceps ubi culmine primum
> *constitit adsuetaque infecit nube penates*,
> protinus attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus,
> gentilisque animos subiit *furor* aegraque laetis
> *invidia* atque parens odii *metus*, inde *regendi*
> *saevus amor*, ruptaeque vices iurisque secundi
> ambitus impatiens, et summo dulcius unum
> stare loco, sociisque comes *discordia* regnis.
>
> (*Theb.* 1.123-30)[725]

There follows the simile describing the brothers as two bulls yoked together and pulling in opposite directions (131-6). Then the pact to alternate rule on an annual basis and its immediate failure is described (137-43) before the narrator explains that the kingdom of Thebes is poor; the brothers are not fighting over anything of value, merely power itself (144-64). Statius' description of the brothers' conflict is of course highly conventional and heavily informed by the imagery of the rhetorical tyrant. Statius uses a number of abstract nouns to describe his protagonists' state of mind (*furor, invidia, metus, discordia*). The animal nature of the brothers' hatred for one another and their tyrannical desire for power is emphasised by the bull simile. The overwhelming and self-destructive desire for power is

[725] The passage is clearly inspired by Senecan tragedy, esp. *Phoen.* 295-302; *Thy.* 23-42: see Vessey (1973) 76-8. However, the Senecan passages lack the emphasis on the poverty of the Theban kingdom.

encapsulated in the idea of madness.[726] The distillation of the nature of tyranny down to one essential characteristic, that of savagery, is visible in his (oxymoronic?) phrase *regendi saevus amor*; Statius avoids figures involving another abstract noun such as *libido* and instead creates a rather more periphrastic expression involving *saevitia*, an expression that reconfigures tyrannical obsession with power as a lover's desire. Tydeus reworks this phrase in his encounter with Eteocles in book 2, calling his love of rule a *dulcis amor regni* and power an alluring thing, *blandum potestas* (2.399; cf. *summo dulcius unum | stare loco*, 1.129-30). The elegiac love for the *puella* depicted as a form of madness is re-directed in Statius' darker epic universe as an irrational love of power.[727]

Statius' re-framing of tyrannical character in the terms of erotic elegy points to two features of tyranny in his epic. Firstly, we see how both Statius' epic and elegy appropriate other discourses, such as the language of madness and sickness, in order to inform their own diverse narrations.[728] Elegy and epic are also in constant dialogue with one another, re-directing and subverting the other genre's language. Secondly, the choice of erotic elegy as a touchstone for Statius' depiction of tyranny provokes in his audience a comparison of the genre of Roman elegy on the one hand and Flavian epic depictions of tyranny on the other. Roman erotic elegy has unusual qualities that Statius' epic clearly exploits, notably the fact that it was not a genre that had been practised seriously since Ovid's time and that it was a genre with a fairly narrow and extremely well-defined range of expression (the latter helps to explain the former, of course). Elegy is a highly repetitive art form, reworking a small number of dramatic situations by means of a small and highly developed vocabulary and invoking a restricted range of metaphorical constructs.[729] As such, erotic elegy had ossified both in generic terms and in terms of its production, becoming a relatively stable and

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[726] See Hershkowitz (1998a).
[727] Eteocles also plays the erotic lover as he spends a sleepless night waiting for news of the ambush against Tydeus, 3.1-7. Note esp. *tum plurima versat*, 3.5; cf. Prop. 3.17.12; Ov. *Am.* 1.2.8; *AA* 3.718; *Her.* 12.211; and the pathetic, pseudo-tragic *ei mihi*, 3.6.
[728] Cf. e.g. Prop. 1.1 incorporating ideas of disease (*contactum*, 1.1.2), madness (*furor*, 1.1.7; *non sani pectoris*, 1.1.26), and torture (1.1.27-8), with Kennedy (1993) 47-8.
[729] See Kennedy (1993), esp. 'Love's Figures and Tropes', 46-63.

historically determined category with which Statius could work.[730] By framing his construction of tyranny in the discourse of erotic elegy, Statius exposes new elements in the nature of tyrannical discourse. Like Roman elegy, the depiction of tyranny has a very limited range of expression, exemplified by the repetitive use of vocabulary in describing tyrants (esp. *crudelitas/saevitia, superbia, vis* and *libido*, now expressed only as lust for power),[731] a limited number of dramatic situations in which the tyrant may be displayed (e.g. the sleepless and fearful tyrant, dissimulating speech, the lone ruler plotting on throne or in palace) further restricted by the absence of situations where tyrants displays their *hubris* by sacking temples or the sexual perversion, and a limited range of imagery with which these characters are represented (the imagery of madness is complemented by the imagery of erotic elegy). Furthermore, the elegiac tyrants that Statius creates are themselves repetitious creatures and their limitations are visible in the way that individual tyrannical actions are repeated over and over (for example, the refusal of burial to Maeon and the Argive dead) and in the lack of individualised personalities invested in each character; the tyrannical Eteocles is much the same persona as the tyrannical Creon much as elegiac lovers 'lose' their personality as they worry about the lack of attention they receive from their *puellae*. Finding innovative modes of expression as a tyrant becomes difficult to the point of impossibility; like the genre of erotic elegy before it, the genre of 'tyrant' will slowly stagnate. Statius' mapping of his presentation of tyranny onto the genre of erotic elegy suggests that the nature of tyranny itself is subject to the pattern of enervation that Hershkowitz identifies at work in many aspects of Statius' depiction of *furor*.[732] Desire is what gives the tyrant energy, just as elegiac lovers can only exist while the objects of their

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[730] For the ancient attitude to elegy, cf. schol. ad Hor. *Od.* 2.12; Apul. *Apol.* 10; Kennedy (1993) 83-100 for modern scholarship's historicising and hermeneutical approach to elegy and problems inherent in such an approach.

[731] Cf. Elegy's use of similar vocabulary; Tib. 1.10.59-66 describes love in terms of *vis* and *saevitia*, the legitimate limits of violence and the distinction between *vis* in love and in war; Ovid *AA* 1.673-4 on the legitimate use of *vis*. Kennedy (1993) 57 notes: 'Elegy describes 'love' in terms also used to describe 'war' in a society frequently represented these days as obsessed with militarism.' Cf. also Myerowitz (1985) 62-72; Gamel (1989). Statius' invocation of elegiac language highlights how far elegy's militaristic language overlaps with language specifically associated with tyrannical behaviour.

[732] Hershkowitz (1998a) 247-301.

desires are unobtainable. While elegiac lovers 'die' in a very figurative sense when they achieve success in love the tyrants of Statius' epic die in a literal sense. What is more, the initial energy levels appear to be decreasing. Eteocles is 'converted' to tyranny in the first book of the poem and dies in the eleventh; Creon assumes the tyrannical mantle shortly after but fails to survive beyond line 781 of book twelve; Theseus never receives the opportunity to tyrannise; Statius' epic runs out of energy to narrate ever-decreasing circles of tyranny (12.797-809).[733]

This gradual process of tyranny effectively wearing itself out is mirrored in the epic's appropriation of another mode of discourse that is also used very heavily in erotic elegy. If we re-examine *Thebaid* 1.123-30, we can see that the more strident use of rhetorical imagery of tyranny and the language of madness to inform this passage is augmented by the use of a further image to inform the sudden psychological change that Eteocles and Polynices undergo, that of disease.[734] Tisiphone 'infects' the household with her familiar cloud (*adsuetaque infecit nube penates*), creating almost the image of a house struck by the plague.[735] The feelings that both brothers undergo are internalised (*sub pectore*), hinting at the dissimulative nature of tyranny. Moreover, the envy that one brother feels at the other having power is described in terms of sickness (*aegraque laetis | invidia*) while the fear and anxiety that the other has in anticipation of handing over power is framed as a process that causes physical pain (*ut sceptra tenentem | foedere praecipiti semper novus angeret heres*, 1.140-1).[736] Tyranny and the desire for power are effectively a physical disease as well as a psychological disorder. Statius' explanation of Eteocles' and Polynices' tyrannical

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[733] Does the importance of erotic language encourage comparisons between Statius' poetic ship reaching port, 12.809 and elegiac passages such as Prop. 3.24.15-16 or Ovid *AA* 1.6, 771-2? On the metaphor of journeys in elegy, see Kennedy (1993) 49-50.

[734] We might also see the 'contamination' of Statius' epic with elegiac modes of discourse in gendered terms as 'feminisation' of a 'masculine' genre. Such a gendered approach forms a parallel to the weakness, disease and enervation of tyrannical behaviour in the poem. Cf. Kennedy (1993) 31-45 on elegy as a 'female' genre. The elegiac motif of love as disease re-used in epic is most notable is Virgil's depiction of Dido.

[735] *OLD* s.v. *inficio* 4 'to infect'. *Nube* is perhaps a surprising way of expressing the effect of a Fury, cf. Oedipus' *ex more*, 11.615 with Feeney (1991) 341-2. Cf. *Silv.* 3.3.147 for Etruscus' father living an 'unclouded' life.

[736] *OLD* s.v. *ango* 2 'to cause physical pain or distress to'. Note also how the assumption of power is summarised by the action of holding the sceptre.

behaviour in these terms also helps his audience to comprehend how Creon is affected by power in Book 11 of the poem following the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices. He too will fall in love with power and Statius uses the same eroticised language (*blanda potestas | et sceptri malesuadus amor*, 11.655-6) as Creon forgets his dead son and his grief in a manner similar to the single-mindedness of the elegiac lover. Furthermore, the disease metaphor that underpins the tyrannical conflict between Eteocles and Polynices is also apparent when Creon ascends to a throne that is fatal to tyrants (*fatale tyrannis*, 11.654). We know, of course, that Creon will very soon be killed by Theseus, but Statius' mode of expression suggests that the throne is fatal to all who ascend to it, and that Creon's successor will be contaminated in the same way. That this is the case is suggested by Theseus' arrival on the battlefield in Book 12. As he leaps onto the plain before Thebes, Theseus is enraged, apparently by the sight of the unburied dead:

> desilit in campum, qui subter moenia nudos
> adservat manes, dirisque vaporibus aegrum
> aera pulverea penitus sub casside ducens
> ingemit et iustas belli flammatur in iras.
>
> (*Theb.* 12.711-14)

Unburied bodies lead to disease and to the smell that this passage describes.[737] Yet Theseus' appearance on the Theban battlefield suggests that he too is contaminated by the Theban disease. Although we are clearly meant to assume that the sight and smell of corpses on the battlefield enrages Theseus, this is not made explicit. The employment in the final phrase of the quoted passage of a passive verb, fire imagery (*flammatur*) and powerful, possibly uncontrolled emotion (*ingemit, iras*) is highly evocative of the possession of epic heroes by a Fury; Theseus is inflamed into anger just as Tisiphone inflamed Eteocles and

[737] Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 2.70; 3.35; Ash (1999) 64-6. On disease from unburied bodies, see Livy 25.26.11; Sil. *Pun.* 14.611-15; Plut. *Ant.* 50.1.

Polynices.[738] Moreover, we again get a hint at the disease imagery of book 1 as Theseus breathes in the tainted air that is literally sick (*aegrum*) with evil fumes (*diris vaporibus* parallels the Fury's *assueta nube*). Theseus is infected in an even more literal manner by the tyrannical sickness that pervades Thebes. His affliction is worrying given that Theseus is about to become the *de facto* ruler of Thebes.[739]

Yet it is Creon's assumption of power that provides us with an indication that there might be a cure to this disease. Statius' comment on Creon's transformation suggests that mindfulness of the past would have helped Creon (*numquamne priorum | haerebunt documenta novis?*, 11.656-7). Statius' rhetorical question suggests that Theseus at least, having passed up the opportunity to display *clementia*, has fallen into the same trap as Creon. The assertion that his anger is *iusta* seems almost disingenuous in the face of such startling imagery. Yet Statius' rhetorical plea that successors learn from predecessors has a much wider impact than its import for Creon and Theseus. Here *documenta* suggests a sense of exemplarity in the deeds of tyrannical men that accords with the didactic purpose that we analysed in chapter 1.[740] Eteocles, Creon and Theseus are all *documenta*, instructional examples that serve as a warning to future rulers.[741] Tellingly, Creon makes a typical tyrannical misreading of *documenta* when Theseus' envoy Phegeus threatens him with further fighting.[742] Creon wonders why Theseus has not seen the *documenta* provided by Thebes' defeat of Argos (*parvane prostratis ... documenta Mycenis | sanximus?* 12.689-90). On the contrary, Thebes' efforts have already been too great to withstand another onslaught. Creon misunderstands the effect of victory;[743] he has not learnt how to rule well from

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[738] Although Allecto's assault on Turnus, *Aen.* 7.456-9, is clearly influential. On Theseus' madness, cf. Hershkowitz (1998a) 296-301.

[739] Statius' breaking off of narration, 12.797-809, and perhaps also his habit of innovation in mythological narration leave us uncertain as to what happens next. We know that, one day, the Epigoni will come but we do not know when nor what will happen to Thebes in the meantime. We can only assume that Thebes is in Theseus' hands. For the similarities between Theseus' entry into Thebes, 12.782-96, and his triumphal entry into Athens earlier in Book 12, see above, p.212.

[740] See p.59 above.

[741] *TLL* 1805.74-1806.47.

[742] For Domitian correctly reading *documenta* of a different kind, cf. *Silv.* 5.1.40.

[743] Pausanias notes, 9.9.3, that the destructive losses that Thebes suffered became proverbial as a 'Cadmean victory'.

Theban *documenta*. It is perhaps the ability to learn that distinguishes the successful monarch from the tyrant.

Statius provides his audience with a further fascinating model for tyrannical behaviour. The tyrannical character is clearly affected by the assumption of or the possibility of power. The sense that Eteocles, Polynices and Creon may have an innate or genetic predisposition to tyranny is somewhat modified by Theseus' sudden transformation when he reaches Thebes. It is power that motivates in Statius' universe and nothing else and its effects are almost instantaneous. Statius uses the commonplace vocabulary of animal savagery to describe tyrannical behaviour and uses the equally common language of madness to describe the psychology behind his tyrannical rulers. Yet the familiar traits of the lover of Roman erotic elegy are also visible in the tyrant's obsessive love of power and the expression of the love for power as disease, appropriating another elegiac motif. The shift from depicting tyrants as sexually depraved monsters to individuals obsessed by power, and the depiction of this shift through the language of elegy reflects new concerns in the nature of epic tyranny.[744] Elegiac discourse promotes a sense that tyranny lacks individuation, is severely limited in its ability to express itself and displays a self-defeating pattern of enervation. Furthermore, Statius also employs the related imagery of disease to illustrate the nature of the tyrannical condition as sickness. The poet makes prominent suggestions that his depiction of tyrannical behaviour has an exemplary purpose at heart, and that his tyrants become documentary instructions for future rulers.

6. Conclusions: Reading Statius' tyrants in the Roman world.

Statius' poem constructs the idea of tyranny in unusual and startling ways. Statius' tyrants do not conform completely to the regular rhetorical stereotype, lacking some of the more entertaining and memorable traits, focusing entirely on the acquisition of power, being

[744] A shift especially visible in Statius' and Valerius' epics and not one with which Roman literature persevered.

incapable of behaving as tyrants normally would often to the point of comical failure, while characters around them acquire and display the marks of tyrannical behaviour. Statius' tyrants fall down badly as dissimulators, regularly failing to conceal their desires, misunderstanding the desires of others and often being defeated by honest, emotionally frank responses. Statius uses the language of erotic elegy to convey the lust for power that dominates his tyrants and this generic link brings with it a sense of enervation and limitation inherent in (especially his version of) the rhetorical stereotype. Moreover, Statius invokes the language of sickness in his depiction of tyranny, suggesting that love of power might be a disease that one can cure and links this suggestion with the sense that the *Thebaid* is a didactic piece, one that provides a large number of examples from which its readers may learn. Open criticism of and opposition to tyranny is regularly successful in the universe of the *Thebaid* and suicide in opposition to tyranny is worthy of great praise, but it is here that we begin to see a problem in Statius' design. Suicide, whether the noble, politically motivated suicide of Maeon or the selfless sacrifice of Menoeceus, is always self-defeating. Similarly, vocal opposition from the people can be praiseworthy but rarely achieves more than the antagonism of the rulers in question. Most worrying of all, those characters who genuinely make something happen in the face of tyranny tend to become reflections of tyrannical behaviour themselves; Tydeus' opposition to Eteocles reduces him to the wild, bestial savagery that typifies tyrannical rule and ultimately moves him to an act of cannibalism; Theseus seems contaminated in his efforts to restore a measure of righteous rule to Thebes. We can perhaps deduce the means to defeat the cycle of endless tyranny as it operates within the *Thebaid*, indeed, Statius appears to suggest that the cycle is self-defeating, but we have yet to evaluate how the *Thebaid* applies to the 'real world' of Roman politics, if at all, and how it was to be received by its audience.

Reading tyranny in the *Thebaid* can produce some odd reactions. The audience is almost overwhelmed by tyranny's dominance of the poem. Tyrants fall only to be replaced by carbon copy successors; Thebes is a production line for identikit tyrants; characters throughout the poem are afflicted by fits of tyrannical behaviour. Everyone gets to play

tyrant in Statius' poem but nobody does so successfully. The text of the poem reaches saturation point where tyranny becomes the overarching theme of the poem but in many ways ceases to have much meaning for the poem. The poem suggests unusual reactions to its tyrants, not only in the sense that protagonists within the poem react differently to tyranny than one might expect but also in the sense that tyrants are no longer figures that elicit fear but rather contempt and even laughter.

At a political level, removing tyrants becomes a pointless exercise; a new and identical tyrant will replace the old (much like the principate, of course) and old oppositional strategies (such as suicide) no longer have the same impact. The exercise of removing the tyrant from power is futile and, in Statius' epic universe, may even have a negative impact as the poem draws a picture of tyranny that eventually runs out of energy and stagnates. We cannot extract firm conclusions from a poem that ends so aporetically, but the *Thebaid* almost suggests that it is better to allow a tyrannical ruler to remain in power than to replace him; or to follow the metaphor of illness, it is better to try to cure an individual than to eliminate the disease altogether. Eteocles and Polynices are condemned as much for the instability and constant change that their proposed system of alternation entails as for any other aspect of their fraternal conflict (cf. e.g. *alternaque regna*, 1.1; *iure maligno | fortunam transire iubent, 1.139-40; alternoque iugo, 1.175).* Their conflict is swiftly followed first by Creon, then by Theseus. Such a stance against constantly changing rulers in a poem begun at some point around 80 AD inevitably evokes memories of the civil war of 69 AD and may be seen as, to some extent at least, a celebration of the relative stability brought by the Flavians.[745] However, any such conclusion is itself problematised by the very nature of the text that provokes it. Statius never makes clear exactly how one might 'cure' the sickness of tyranny, beyond reading the *Thebaid*. We can only grope towards an unsupported assertion that the poem's multiple *exempla* act as deterrents for the reader (especially if that reader is Domitian!), illustrations of how not to behave. To take the elegiac comparison one stage further, Statius sets himself up in the role of *magister tyrannidis*, a dark *alter ego* of Ovid's

[745] Cf. p.23 on the dates of the *Thebaid*'s composition.

teacher of love. The absence of any concrete assertion of such a purpose on the poet's part means that this large conclusion, though viable, rests on very small foundations (the poet's reaction to Eteocles' and Polynices' deaths, his reaction to Creon's assumption of tyranny, the concluding lines of the poem). Furthermore, any such interpretation is undercut by the nature of the tyranny that the *Thebaid* depicts. At odds with the rhetorical stereotype that is the norm in Roman writing, the poem presents an alternative view of tyranny that is difficult to equate with the Roman reality. The models and solutions we can generate may only really work within the poem's universe and not in the wider world.

We have seen how Statius pushes his poem towards the realities of Roman political life. Argive heroes display Roman *virtus*, Maeon's suicide is almost a model of Stoic, politically motivated suicide, that of Menoeceus presented as a form of *devotio*, Eteocles is cast in the mould of *princeps*, while Theseus' intervention is read through the Roman virtue of *clementia*. Theban mythological epic merges with contemporary Roman reality. Yet as Statius pushes his poem towards reality, the epic narrative resists. We see the flaws in the comparisons, the moments where the narrative fails to fit the model. Heroes are destroyed by the displays of *virtus*, suicide is a self-defeating action and one that ultimately does not deserve to be repeated. Menoeceus' suicide is a flawed *devotio*, and he assumes tyrannical proportions in his act of self-killing. Eteocles fails to live up to the rhetorical and historical models of tyrannical *principes* with which he is so closely compared. *Clementia* is not seen as an uncomplicated good and Theseus ultimately fails to live up to expectations. The depiction of tyranny in the *Thebaid* cannot compare to the historical reality; Statius' tyrants are unreal. The poem fails to bridge the gap between Greek myth and Roman reality and finishes without a clean conclusion; the poem ends exhausted, unable to answer the questions it poses. The *Thebaid* is comprehensible through the Roman world for which it was composed but it cannot be an allegory for Domitian's Rome.

Nevertheless, the view of Statius as a critic of brazen opposition to tyranny and as an advocate of 'working within the system' is attractive as it fits nicely with Statius' later career. Those portions of the *Silvae* and *Achilleid* that refer to Domitian are exceptionally

positive in their appraisal of an emperor who was becoming, by all subsequent accounts, one of Rome's worst tyrants. Statius is, among the wreckage of Domitian's Rome, a success story; a professional poet of genuinely humble origins made good, achieving financial success and joining the canon of great literary practitioners of Rome. He succeeded by working within the restraints of and exploiting the opportunities afforded by the system; Statius is not a man afraid to buck literary trends, but he reveals a sharpness in knowing exactly where to draw the line when financial or political concerns are at stake. For those who find the idea of Statius as a cynical manipulator unpalatable, we should remember that his sycophancy towards his benefactors at the beginning and end of the *Thebaid*, throughout the *Silvae*, and at the beginning of the *Achilleid* demonstrates a willingness to please his benefactors; it makes no sense for Statius to present a serious, open attack on tyranny.

CONCLUSIONS: THE POET AS DIVINE TEACHER

The idea of Statius as a man working within the system that we detected in the last chapter is visible in a later poem, *Silvae* 4.2. The poem thanks Domitian for inviting Statius to a banquet at his new palace on the Palatine. Statius compares Domitian's banquet to the great feasts of epic (4.2.1-17). Domitian is presented as a divine host, his palace as indescribably large and beautiful (17-45). Statius compares him to a number of deities, and the list culminates with Domitian portrayed as Jupiter feasting with the Ethiopians while the Muses and Apollo sing for him (46-56). Statius wishes long life for Domitian and compares his day in the palace to his triumph in the Alban games. Yet this poem has further function, combining praise of the emperor with a commentary on the trajectory of Statius' poetic career.

The physical description and comparison of emperor and Jupiter combine a series of different ways of regarding and understanding the emperor, as god, as triumphant military leader, but above all as the divine hero of an epic. Epic language and epic ideas permeate this short hexameter poem.[746] The opening lines recall two more famous epic banquets, that of Aeneas in Dido's palace and that of Odysseus in Alcinous' palace (4.2.1-4), and the poem's periphrastic opening (*qui... intulit*, 4.2.2) evokes the opening of epic poems.[747] Furthermore, Domitian's palace alludes to the palace of Latinus in *Aeneid* 7 (4.2.18, cf. *Aen.* 7.170). Statius denies his ability in a quasi-*recusatio*, even were he inspired by Smyrna and Mantua, the birthplaces of Homer and Virgil, to write the wonders of the Domitianic banquet (4.2.8-10).[748] Statius' expression of surprise at seeing his emperor's face (*datur ora*

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[746] See Hulls (forthcoming, 2007). Newlands (2002) 263-70 overplays the influence of Pindar *Olympian* 6 which she sees especially in 4.2.7-8, *qua celebrem mea vota lyra, quas solvere grates | sufficiam?* Harrison (1995) 120-1 points out that Statius uses the lyre to symbolise both lyric and epic. It would be more productive to see Statius combining these genres in this poem.

[747] See Coleman (1988) ad 4.2.2.

[748] *Non, si pariter mihi vertice laeto | nectat adoratas et Smyrna et Mantua lauros, | digna loquar*, 4.2.8-10. The image of Statius' head being wreathed is repeated at *Ach.* 1.9-10. Cf. *Silv.*4.4.93. I would also like to see the *necdum* at *Ach.* 1.18 as a parallel for the *necdum* of *Silv.* 4.2.52. Cf. also the programmatic use of *nondum* at *Theb.* 1.17; 12.1. *Silvae* 4 was published in AD 95, and Statius was already composing the *Achilleid*, see *Silvae* 4.4.93-4; 4.7.21-4.

tueri, 4.2.16) repeats Anchises' exclamation at seeing Aeneas in the underworld (*datur ora tueri, Aen.* 6.688) and the intertextual recollection of Anchises' words puts a very different spin on events in Domitian's palace. The father/son relationship in the *Aeneid* casts the relationship between court poet and emperor in a private and intimate light. Statius thinks himself in heaven on earth (4.2.10-12) and by implication Domitian's combination of divine presence and personal intimacy makes this heavenly atmosphere a reality for Statius. The palace is riddled with epic clichés, the countless columns evoking the countless tongues *topos* (4.2.18-20)[749] and the astonishing scale and beauty of the ceiling (*longa supra species*, 4.2.30) evoking not only the vault of heaven but also the scale of the Theban narrative of which Statius' *Thebaid* is but a small part (*longa retro series, Theb.* 1.7). The *Thebaid* is backward looking, not yet ready to take on the task of describing Domitian (*nondum*, 1.17, 12.1). By contrast, in *Silvae* 4.2 that task is complete (66-7) and the poem looks upwards at Domitian's palace and forwards in anticipation of a long life for the emperor (57-62). The gods with whom the emperor is compared are all pictured in epic contexts (4.2.46-56). The wish for a long life for Domitian (4.2.57-67) tropes the similar wishes for Nero in Lucan (1.45-7) and for Domitian in Statius' *Thebaid* (1.22-31). The poem ends with Statius remembering his triumph at the Alban games (even the oblique reference *Troianae... sub collibus Albae* in line 65 seems pointed and recalls the Virgilian theme of lines 1-2) where he sang of Domitian's campaigns in Dacia and Germany in what must have been epic poetry (*Germanas acies*, 4.2.66 clearly evokes *fraternas acies, Theb.* 1.1).

We can move beyond this level of interpretation. Statius creates what is in effect a tiny epic poem, depicting an(other) epic banquet. We are at the culmination of a long line of epic banquets: Jupiter and the Ethiopians, Odysseus and Alcinous, Aeneas and Dido, Domitian and Statius. Yet Statius presents *Silvae* 4.2 as beyond the limits of traditional epic discourse. He claims early in the poem that epic poetry will not be adequate for the description of his vision of the emperor (4.2.5-10; *digna loquar*, 10, professes the same kind of poetic inadequacy that *parva loquor*, 4.2.52, portrays), but it is Virgilian and Homeric

[749] See Hinds (1998) 34-47.

epic that is inadequate for this elevated task. The hackneyed clichés of epic discourse cannot describe the figure of the emperor. Domitian's banquet is a novel experience for Statius, but requires a novel kind of poetry by a different poet (*ast ego... nova gaudia ... | nunc primum*, 4.2.5-6). Epic discourse is inadequate to the challenge of describing Domitian's palace (*tectum augustum, ingens, non centum insigne columnis*, 18 outdoes *Aen.* 7.170 by the simple addition of *non*). Above all, the description of the divine emperor is beyond the language of epic. Statius breaks new poetic ground in his choices of vocabulary and unusual phraseology, adapting the language of prose and especially historiographical writing in the centrepiece of his 'new epic' in order to meet the novel challenge of describing a divine emperor.[750] The poem combines epic, panegyric and other, more novel forms of poetic discourse.[751] For Statius, the opportunity to write this new kind of poetry is a poetic rebirth (*steriles transmisimus annos | haec aevi mihi prima dies, hic limina vitae*, 4.2.12-13), and we must assume from this that he will leave traditional epic poetry behind in favour of this higher genre.[752]

The relationship between Domitian and Statius is mutually beneficial.[753] Gaze, self-presentation and viewing are central to the poetics of this poem. Domitian needs his super-poet to describe what might otherwise be ineffable. Moreover, Statius makes Domitian a divine epic hero who has put his weapons aside for the moment to enjoy the banquet. Statius magnifies the emperor's status through this device, but re-examination of the epic parallels that Statius evokes creates further complication. In the simile that compares Domitian to Jupiter dining with the Ethiopians, Statius' role is clear. He is compared to Apollo singing a Gigantomachy. However, the comparisons made with the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* create further complications. Domitian is the host of this banquet and therefore is to be compared

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[750] The *Silvae* are here portrayed as superior to epic, bucking a trend seen elsewhere. Cf. Nauta (2006) 34-7; Gibson (2006) 164-7. 4.2 is closer to Martial's rejections of grand themes and mythological poetry (*1.107; 8.3; 10.4*). Cf. Nauta (2006) 37-40.

[751] The combination of genres is also suggested by *lyra* (27): see above, p.272.

[752] Although in reality Statius had already commenced work on his *Achilleid* as he was publishing *Silvae* 4. See Coleman (1988) xx-xxi.

[753] Newlands, (2002) 280-1 presents the relationship between emperor and poet in terms of patronage which misses the point somewhat.

with Alcinous or Dido. The main 'narrators' at each of those banquets are Odysseus and Aeneas and it is with these two that Statius, by implication, compares himself, as well as (lines 9-10) claiming superiority to Homer and Virgil. Statius himself, therefore, assumes the mantle of epic hero as well as epic poet. It is Statius who sings of the current banquet, not Domitian, himself a capable epicist,[754] and it is Statius who recalls the story-teller role of Odysseus and Aeneas by recalling, through intertextual effect, his *Thebaid* (and *Achilleid*?) and through direct reminiscence his epic on the German and Dacian wars (lines 65-7).[755] Domitian is presented as a godlike hero. Yet the implication is that Statius, by summoning the skill to tell of this banquet, raises his own status considerably. He exceeds the two greatest epic poets in Greek and Latin and outdoes both their epic heroes. Statius himself becomes the equivalent of a god, this time Apollo, the god of poetry. Statius' praise for Domitian in this poem provokes strong reactions; his sycophancy is nauseating. Nonetheless, there is a powerful benefit in all of this. Statius augments his status enormously; the jobbing poet and *grammaticus'* son whom Juvenal described as pimping his work to Paris (Juv. 7.82-7) becomes Apollo as he raises Domitian to the status of Jupiter. The change in status allows Statius to speak to Domitian as (near) equal. Domitian needs Statius; his song constructs the ideology that the emperor craves. The relationship becomes one of co-dependents.

Silvae 4.2 has a further means of interacting with epic discourse. This poem is a new kind of epic that does not suffer from the enervation that plagued the *Thebaid*.[756] Statius' references to other epic consistently depict it as tired. Ulysses is exhausted by Homer (*aequore qui multo reducem consumpsit Ulixem*, 4.2.4). Statius himself sees his former years as an epicist as sterile (*steriles transmisimus annos*, 4.2.12), while his day with Domitian marks his passing across the threshold to a new life (*hic limina vitae*, 4.2.13).[757] Statius' transformation of countless tongues into countless columns changes poetic inability into

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[754] Cf. Mart. 5.5.7; Stat. *Ach.* 1.16-17; Quint. *IO* 10.1.91; Suet. *Dom.* 20. See Coleman (1986) 3087-95.

[755] Statius compares himself to Achilles singing about Briseis before fighting Hector at *Silvae* 4.4.35-6.

[756] See Hershkowitz (1998a) 247-301.

[757] *OLD* s.v. *sterilis* 4. On the language of liminality in the *Thebaid*, see Henderson (1991) 66n.55.

architectural superfluity (4.2.18-20). The view is so vast that you can scarcely see the roof with tired eyes (*fessis vix culmina prendas | visibus*, 4.2.30-1); these eyes must be tired by epic viewing. The gods to whom Domitian is initially compared are all exhausted by epic exploits (*recumbit...lubrica ponit membra...iacet...gravis Alcides gaudebat acclinare*, 4.2.46-51); yet Domitian is *different* from the comparatively little things (*parva...Germanice*, 4.2.52). Instead, Domitian is like a Jupiter who is *not* tired, but enjoying himself (4.2.53-6). Statius' novel micro-epic breaks the boundaries and limitations of traditional epic just as the poet urges his emperor to break the established boundaries of human aging (*patriae bis terque exire senectae | adnuerint fines*, 4.2.58-9).

Silvae 4.2 should be read as a development of Statius' self-presentation in the *Thebaid*. His mythological epic has the twin aim of surpassing Virgil's *Aeneid* and constructing a dialogue with Domitian. The poem enacts a radical deconstruction of Virgilian epic discourse. The central values of Virgilian epic, including *virtus*, *pietas*, and *clementia* are thoroughly undermined; the *Aeneid*'s sense of heroism, duty and mercy is swept away in Statius' recasting of mythological epic as civil war. Furthermore, Statius' epic destabilises the depiction of evildoers in epic poetry; tyranny becomes a volatile concept and traditional responses to tyranny, while praiseworthy, are no longer valid. The chaos of civil war runs through the meaning of the text itself; the categories of tyrant and opponent, hero and villain no longer differentiate between one character and another; Virgilian language itself becomes meaningless.

Yet the *Thebaid* is not purely destructive of meaning. In deconstructing epic, Statius constructs a dialogue with his emperor, one whose aim is ostensibly to educate. Statius will provide the new epic language that will drive the ideology of Domitian's regime. *Silvae* 4.2 shows that Statius' constant cries of *nondum* are not as disingenuous as we expect. Moreover, the *Thebaid* is not simply an overblown attempt to prove that Virgilian epic is dead; Statius' exemplary heroes and weakling tyrants are educational is another sense. In our opening chapter, we discussed the allusion in the *Thebaid*'s programmatic statements to two major models of didactic poetry, by Lucretius and Horace. Statius' poem alludes to all forms

of learning from schoolboy lessons to pure philosophical truth yet leaves us to decide what lesson his poem constitutes. The narrator's comment to Creon (*numquamne priorum | haerebunt documenta novis?*, 11.656-7) suggests that the lessons of the *Thebaid* are closer to the schoolroom *elementa* of Horace's *Epistles* than the grand philosophy of Lucretius. Thus Creon's misreading of *documenta* suggests that the *Thebaid* is a negative example, an instruction to rulers and young men on how *not* to behave. Moreover, the combination of *reges, iuvenes* and Domitian as the targets for Statius' education adds to the notion that these are the first lessons, baby steps on the Statian path to knowledge. Domitian was only twenty nine years old when he acceded to the throne in 81 AD and if Dio could write of his forty one year old brother as youthful, then it is not implausible that Domitian should occupy all these categories. The *Thebaid* as an educational text mimics another example of didactic from Lucretius of lessons that one should not follow:

> *illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis*
> *impia te rationis inire elementa viamque*
> *indugredi sceleris.*
>
> (Lucretius *DRN* 1.80-2)

Lucretius reassures his readers that they will not be embarking on an impious course of learning. He combines the image of the path of learning with the idea of *elementa*, both of great importance especially in the *Thebaid*'s sphragis. We should, therefore, suggest that Statius' epic mimics Lucretius' *impia elementa*, a path not to be followed. Statius' warning to his *Thebais*, not to follow the divine *Aeneid* too closely, acquires new meaning. The *Aeneid*'s path has become *impia* as *Thebais* deconstructs the virtues, structures and meanings of her model poem. The *Aeneid*'s divinity will be superseded by a new model of poetic and imperial godliness. Domitian should read the *Thebaid* as an exemplary poem and only equipped with this basic knowledge can he achieve the divine status that Statius accords him. Statius himself will benefit from this process of learning. Domitian will rely on

the poet who educates and who creates Domitian's divine image and in the process Statius *too will become divine.*

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APPENDIX

Thebaid 12. 816: *Vive precor* and correspondences

Using forms of *vivere* (or *vita*) and *precari* (or *preces*) within the space of a few lines is not an uncommon occurrence in Latin literature, but using both together in a prayer for a long life or similar is rather rarer. The combination of a part of the verb *vivere*, especially as an imperative or jussive subjunctive, and a part of *precari* (almost always as *precor*) creates an unusual and striking phrase, and close correspondences to the Statian figure only occur in poetic texts. Broadly speaking, the parallel passages can be divided into three groups according to the way in which they are used: curses (Tibullus 2.6, Ovid *Ibis*),[758] praise of emperors (Ovid *Fasti* 3, Mart. 11.4), and expressions of grief in some sense (the remaining parallels). I have collected together similar occurrences of *vivere* and *precari* from Statian and earlier literature in chronological order:

Tibullus 2.6.53-4 (Tibullus cursing a *lena*):
tunc tibi, lena, precor diras: satis anxia vivas,
moverit e votis pars quotacumque deos.

Ovid *Heroides* 5.21-30 (Oenone to Paris):[759]
insicae servant a te mea nomina fagi
et legor Oenone falce notata tua,
[populus est,memini, fluviali consita rivo,
est in qua nostri littera scripta memor.]
et quantum trunci, tantum mea nomina crescunt.
crescite et in titulos surgite recta meos!
populе, vive, precor, quae consita margine ripae
hoc in rugoso cortice carmen habes:
CUM PARIS OENONE POTERIT SPIRARE RELICTA
AD FONTEM XANTHI VERSA RECURRIT AQUA.

Heroides 7.63 (Dido to Aeneas):
vive, precor! sic te melius quam funere perdam

Met. 7.24-5 (Medea speaking of Jason):
vivat tamen! idque precari
vel sine amore licet; quid enim commisit Iason?

Fasti 3.427-8 (Ovid prays for long life for the temple of Vesta and Augustus):
quos sancta fovet ille manu, bene vivitis, ignes:
vivite inexstincti, flammaque duxque, precor.

Fasti 5.412 (Achilles to Chiron):
vive, precor, nec me, care, relinque, pater.

Tristia 1.7.25-6 (Ovid speaking to the *Metamorphoses*):
nunc precor ut vivant et non ignava legentem
otia delectent admoneantque mei.

Tristia 4.4.47-50 (prayer to the emperor):
forsitan hanc ipsam, vivam modo, finiet olim,
tempore cum fuerit lenior ira, fugam.
nunc precor hinc alio iubeat discedere, si non

---

[758] Both passages use *precor... vivas* to introduce the idea that the target of the curse will live a life of misery, in the Tibullan poem, the poet hopes that the *lena* will live a life of unspecified *diras*, in Ovid's *Ibis*, the poet prays that his target will live a long life in Tomis, the place of Ovid's exile. There seems little more to say on these two passages other than that they appear to invert the more frequent use of *vive, precor* as an expression of grief.

[759] Lines 23-24 are omitted as spurious: see Knox (1995) *ad loc.*

nostra verecundo vota pudore carent.

Ibis 635-6 (final curse of the poem):
denique Sarmaticas inter Geticasque sagittas
his precor ut vivas et moriare locis.

Lucan 7.539-43 (prayer that Roman blood be spared):
aut, si Romano compleri sanguine mavis,
istis parce, precor; vivant Galataeque Syrique,
Cappadoces Gallique extremique orbis Hiberi,
Armenii, Cilices; nam post civilia bella
hic populus Romanus erit.

Seneca *Oedipus* 855 (Old Man):
procul sit omen; vivit et vivat precor.

Hercules Oetaeus 1497-8 (Hercules):
tuque ipsa planctus pone funereos, precor,
o clara genetrix: vivet Alcides tibi.

Martial 2.11.7 (Selius is grieving not because he has any serious problem (his children live and may they continue to do so) but because he has to dine at home):
uterque natus vivit et precor vivat

11.4.6-8 (prayer for a long life for Nerva):
Iane, refers Nervae; vos precor ore pio:
hunc omnes servate ducem, servate senatum;
moribus hic vivat principis, ille suis.

Statius *Silvae* 2.3.43-52 (the tree of Atedius Melior is addressed by Pan):
vive diu nostri pignus memorabile voti,
arbor, et haec durae latebrosa cubilia nymphae
tu saltem declinis ama, preme frondibus undam.
illa quidem meruit, sed ne, precor, igne superno
aestuet aut dura feriatur grandine; tantum
spargere tu laticem et foliis turbare memento.
tunc ego teque recolam dominamque benignae
sedis et inlaesa tutabor utramque senecta,
ut Iovis, ut Phoebi frondes, ut discolor umbra
populus et nostrae stupeant tua germina pinus.

Of the 16 close parallels to 12.816 *vive, precor*, 8 are to be found in Ovid. Only the curse in Tibullus 2.6 is earlier than any of these and, if we believe the *Hercules Oetaeus* to be by an author other than Seneca, only Martial and Statius use this combination more than once. The exact combination of *vive* and *precor* in the same syntactical unit is only to be found in Ovid (3 times). Statius *Silvae* 2.3 is roughly contemporaneous with the end of the *Thebaid*, Martial book 11 was certainly written after 96 AD. On the doubtful authenticity of *Hercules Oetaeus*, see Zwierlein (1986) 313-43. On the dating of the *Thebaid* and *Silvae*, see Coleman (1988) xv-xxii. Given the overwhelming prevalence of Ovidian texts in the parallel passages, and the fact that only one parallel (and not an especially close one) is earlier than Ovid, I would suggest that the combination, *vive precor* has a peculiarly Ovidian resonance.

The common theme of grief that the majority of these corresponding passages portray is conveyed in a variety of different ways. In the *Metamorphoses*, Medea's fight against her passion, tellingly portrayed as *furor* (*Met.* 7.10) rather than *amor*, culminates in a desire to see Jason live (*vivat tamen! idque precari*, 7.24).[760] Her restless passion is evocative of Dido's ultimately self-destructive love in *Aeneid* 4 and anticipates the disasters that will befall her in Ovid's narrative (7.1-403 covers

[760] On the conflict within Medea between erotic *furor* and rational *mens*, see Hershkowitz (1998) 165-6.

her story from meeting Jason to her flight to Aegeus).[761] A similar sense of hope and anticipation in Medea's prayer is undercut by the reader's foreknowledge of what will happen to her. The comparison between the *Thebaid*'s sphragis and Ovid's Medea also complicates the image of *Aeneid* and *Thebaid* as husband and wife, adding to the sense of an ultimately destructive relationship. Equally dark themes are to be found in Lucan's combination *precor; vivant* (*BC* 7.540) which prays that Roman blood be spared from Pharsalus and civil war; if this is not possible, then those people who live in places that will become Roman provinces after the civil war should be spared. The negativity that colours Lucan's depiction of the battle of Pharsalus also affects his optimistic portrayal of his own poem's future in the passage more frequently read alongside Statius' *vive* (*BC* 9.980-6). The two Senecan (or pseudo-Senecan) tragedies follow similar patterns. In Seneca's *Oedipus* the unnamed Old Man prays that the baby given to him by Phorbas, Oedipus himself of course, lives still (*vivit et vivat precor*, *Oed.* 855). Ironically, the truth of Oedipus' birth and parentage is about to be revealed even as the Old Man makes his prayer. His and Oedipus' own optimism will turn rapidly to grief and self-destructive anger. Similarly, the speech by Hercules to his mother in *Hercules Oetaeus* (*pone funereos, precor, | o clara genetrix, vivet Alcides tibi*, *HO* 1497-8) carries a similar combination of optimism for the future and anticipation of imminent disaster. Clearly this is a phrase especially useful and appropriate in epic and tragedy.

Martial plays with this literary inheritance and comes up with a comic version of the *vivere precari* combination. In Martial 2.11, Selius grieves not for any serious reason but because he must dine at home. In another generic cross-contamination, this time of epic and (aetiological) elegy, Ovid portrays Achilles anticipating the death of his tutor Chiron (*vive precor*, *Fasti* 5.412). Here we see the same formulation at the same point in the line as in the *Thebaid* and with the same sense of grief and imminent disaster; Chiron must face another nine days of suffering before his transformation into a constellation. The centaur assumes the role of Achilles' father (*ut ante patrem*, *F.* 5.407), another uncomfortable surrogate relationship when read (as an intertext) in the context of the *Thebaid*. The initial conclusions that we may draw from this analysis are obvious. Statius invokes a formula, *vive precor*, that looks to the future, combines optimism with a more powerful sense of doom and an anticipation of destruction in the future. The phrase also casts the poet's relationship with his poem in a different, more intimate light. This is a phrase that sons use of fathers (Achilles in the *Fasti*), fathers of sons (the Old Man in *Oedipus*, Martial of Selius and his children). This is a phrase used by someone waiting by a death-bed, not by poet sending his poem out into the wider world. There is a closeness between poet and personified poem that matches the closeness of the relationship illustrated between *Thebaid* and *Aeneid*.

[761] See Bömer (1969-86) *ad loc.*

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